

COMMUNICATION / INFORMATION BUREAU

DELHI CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE

-10, BHAI VEER SINGH MARG, NEW DELHI-110001

PRESS STATEMENT

New Delhi, 5th February 2015

### **POLICE USE FORCE ON CHRISTIAN PROTESTERS**

Police arrested Christian leaders and people who protested peacefully

The Christian community in the national capital, New Delhi, staged a peaceful protest today for the second time in two months demanding that the High Court monitor investigations into the attacks on five city churches since December last year.

Even before the protest began, the police began to use brutal force and arrested leaders and people who were just beginning to gather in front of the Sacred Heart Cathedral. Some of the leaders who were arrested forcefully and brutally attacked include Fr. Susai Sebastian, Fr. Dominic Emmanuel, Mr. John Dayal, Mr. A. C. Micheal, Mr. Jenis Francis, Mrs. Rita and many sisters who were elderly people and staging a peaceful protest with prayers and singing hymns.

Hearing of the arrests and brutality of the police force, Archbishop Anil Couto, the Archbishop of Delhi said, "This is a sad incident. I strongly condemn the action of the police who assaulted the priests, nuns and the elderly people who were holding a peaceful demonstration in front of the church. This is not acceptable in a democratic country such as India and it is a blatant violation of fundamental rights enshrined in our constitution."

The community says it has lost faith in Delhi police which has failed to solve the conspiracy that has led to the vandalism, arson and desecration of churches. Instead of probing the crimes, the police has consistently tried to minimize them. Despite detailed complaints, the effort has been to list them as minor thefts or short circuits.

The Christian community had come out in large numbers on 2nd December 2014 and had marched to the Delhi police headquarters after the St Sebastian Catholic Church, in East Delhi's Dilshad Garden, was gutted in a fire the previous night. The police promised a thorough investigation, but more than two months on, has not announced any progress in the case.

The latest incident that shocked the community was the desecration of the Holy Communion by persons who broke into St. Alphonsa's Church in Vasant Kunj on 2nd February 2015. The Parish priest pointed out that the attempt was to hurt the religious feelings of the community as nothing of substance was stolen from the church. Three donation boxes and other precious things were left untouched. The local police, apparently under orders of the senior officers, registered a case of theft.

Community representatives from all localities of the national capital gathered at the sacred Heart Cathedral at Gole Dak-khana. In a memorandum to the Home Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh community representatives listed the five recent attacks in churches:

1. St. Sebastian Church, Dilshad Garden [1 December 2014]: The entire interior burnt. Police action was promised. No information on the progress made by Delhi police.
2. Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Jasola [3 December 2014] Window smashed by rock during Holy Mass services, glass pieces on altar: Police silent
3. Church of Resurrection, Rohini, [3 January 2015] Crib with statues burnt to ashes. Effort to pass it off as short circuit
4. Our Lady of Grace, Vikaspuri, [14 January, 2015] Grotto attacked. CCTV captures images of vandals. Police arrest three men, claim they did it as a drunken prank.
5. St. Alphonsa's Church, Vasant Kunj [2 February 2015 Church broken into, Sacred Host [holy communion] desecrated. Despite detailed complaint, police trying to minimize crime as "theft" and "breaking into residential house"

It is quite clear that the Delhi police has failed to give these crimes the attention they deserve, and is trying to trivialize them, the memorandum said.

Elsewhere in the country, the targeted and communal violence continues with its vicious hate campaign, physical violence, police complicity, and State impunity in the persecution of the Christian community in many states of India. Human Rights and Civil Society groups have documented the death of two persons in 2014, killed for their Christian faith. The Persecution data lists 147 cases. An analysis of the data shows Chhattisgarh topping the list with 28 incidents of crime, followed closely by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh with 26, Uttar Pradesh with 18 and Telengana, a newly carved out of Andhra Pradesh, with 15 incidents.

Much of the violence has taken place after the new government of the National Democratic alliance headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, came into power on 26 May, 2014. The violence peaked between August and October with 56 cases, before zooming up to 25 cases during the Christmas season. The violence has continued well into the New Year 2015, with more Catholic churches in the city targeted as incidents continue in other states. Much of the violence, 54 percent, is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. The two cases of death in communal anti-Christian violence were reported from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

The memorandum recalled that the President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, noted the rise of communalism and the targeting of religious minorities in his address to the Nation on 25th January 2015, the eve of Republic Day. President Mukherjee said "In an international environment where so many countries are sinking into the morass of theocratic violence ... We have always reposed our trust in faith-equality where every faith is equal before the law and every culture blends into another to create a positive dynamic. The violence of the tongue cuts and wounds people's hearts. The Indian Constitution

is the holy book of democracy. It is a lodestar for the socio-economic transformation of an India whose civilisation has celebrated pluralism, advocated tolerance and promoted goodwill between diverse communities. These values, however, need to be preserved with utmost care and vigilance.”

The memorandum demanded that the government take urgent and effective measures to restore the Rule of Law, curb the targeted and communal violence. The guilty must be traced, and action under the law should be taken. Police officers must be held accountable for communal crimes in their jurisdiction. “In Delhi, we demand a Special Investigating team be set up to investigate the five acts of violence against the catholic Churches, monitored by the High Court of Delhi,” community leaders said.