

Hunger Strike

For Human Dignity Of The Christian And Muslim Dalits

"This hunger strike is the expression of hunger for justice, hunger for equality and hunger for human dignity of the Christian and Muslim Dalits. This is an ongoing struggle for the past sixty years."

Church groups and Christian activists completed a four-day protest in New Delhi on 28 July, speaking out against the Indian government policies that discriminate against Christian and Muslim Dalits.

Nearly 10,000 Christians, including four dozen bishops of different

denominations, took part in the protest, which included a hunger strike. The protest closed with a march to the Parliament building.

"This hunger strike is not a mere strike; it is the expression of hunger for justice, hunger for equality and hunger for human dignity of the Christian and Muslim Dalits. This is an ongoing struggle for the past sixty years," said the Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, Gen. Secretary, NCCI, addressing the participants in the hunger strike jointly organized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, National Council of Churches in India, and the National Council of Dalit Christians, demanding the inclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims in the Scheduled Caste list.

The Most Rev. Vincent M. Concessao, Arch Bishop of Delhi, said that the church took up the cause of the reservation of Dalit



Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad addresses the participants in the hunger strike

Christians and Muslims because the God, the church believes in, is the God of justice. "This Dharna is a warning to all those who are in power", he added. The Archbishop cautioned the ruling party that they could not continue to neglect the ever growing voices for justice.

"We want the government to act on our decades-old demand," said Fr. G. Cosmon Arokiaraj, executive secretary of the Dalit commission of the Catholic Church. "The discrimination against us amounts to denial of the freedom of religion and equality guaranteed by the constitution," added Arokiaraj.

Dalit Christians are "disappointed and disillusioned. They feel that the government has let them down and betrayed their hopes," said a memorandum to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The memorandum, signed by officials of the National Council of Churches in India, the Catholic church, and a network of Dalit Christian activists, cited the report of a government commission stating Christian Dalits live "in abject poverty and squalor, engaged in demeaning occupations to keep



March to the Parliament

Hunger Strike for Human Dignity

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Grant immediately the Scheduled Caste status to Christian and Muslim Dalits

Dalit, which means “trampled upon,” refers to lower castes treated as untouchables in the Indian society. Most eke out a living with menial jobs in rural areas while living in segregation from upper castes. Christian Dalits seek the “scheduled caste” recognition from the government, accorded to Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist lower caste people, that would allow them better access to education and jobs.

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body and soul together, and bereft of sanitation, medical aid and other facilities.”

Bishop V. Devasahayam of the Madras diocese of the Church of South India, who camped in Indian capital during the protests, said



Church leaders at the strike-venue

“the mistake made by Christians is that we have been undertaking fasts and prayers only. We need to make our voices heard.”

Mr. V.J. George, National Convener, NCDC, Prof. Dr. Mary John, Chairman, NCDC, Fr. Bosco, Mrs Leila Passah, General Secretary, YWCA, Mrs. Rao, Former Vice President of NCCI, Mr. Alwan Masih, CNI General Secretary, Mr Aaris Mohammed and Mr Franklin Caesar addressed the gathering and expressed their anguish, anger, and protest against the issue-evading government. They raised the demand for repealing the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order 1950, paragraph 3, which goes against the SC status of Christian and Muslim Dalits. Religion should not be the criterion for the caste based reservation. The fact that the Ranganath Misra Commission, Minority Commission, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and many a political party support reservation for Dalit Christians and Muslims was expounded by the speakers.



March to the Parliament

The rally passed the following resolutions:

- We resolve to observe August 10th, which was the day of the implementation of the unjust paragraph 3 of the Constitution Scheduled Caste order 1950, as 'Black Day', all over India as a sign of protest against the denial of equal rights.
- The Christians along with other supportive communities will take a political stand not to support the parties which do not favour their demand for SC status.
- The Bishops are requested to write a strong letter to the Prime minister of India to express this serious concern.

– Reported by

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