



13 February 2025

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear Commissioners,

EU SHOULD TAKE ACTION ON URGENT HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN INDIA

As the College of Commissioners prepares to visit India amid efforts to [upgrade](#) the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and India, our organizations urge EU leaders to step up their engagement with their Indian counterparts in light of the profound human rights crisis in the country.

India has witnessed a serious deterioration in human rights in the last decade. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government has systematically weakened the country's independent institutions that are essential to hold the executive accountable, and escalated its crackdown on peaceful dissent, press freedom, civil society and religious minorities. The Indian authorities have increasingly used federal laws to target their political opponents and civil society groups on allegations of financial irregularities. In multiple instances, authorities have used the country's draconian anti-terrorism law against human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, activists and academics. There has been a significant increase in hate speech by officials and ruling party leaders, incitement to violence against marginalized groups and attacks against religious minorities, even as the authorities have failed to take adequate action against those responsible.

The Indian authorities continue to repress human rights defenders, civil society and dissenting voices using a range of counterterrorism, foreign funding and anti-money laundering laws, including the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) and others. The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee [called](#) for the review and amendment of these laws following a recent evaluation of India in June 2024. Similarly, in June 2024, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – of which the European Commission and several EU states are members – [recommended](#) that India put in place measures to prevent the abuse of counterterrorism policies against non-governmental groups, following its [mutual evaluation](#) of India's regimes to counter money laundering and terrorist financing.

Still, the Indian authorities continue to restrict non-profit organizations on vague and overly-broad grounds and cancel their licenses to receive foreign donations under the FCRA. The authorities also continue to arrest human rights defenders, journalists, students, and academics with impunity under the UAPA, India's anti-terrorism law.

The National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRCI) has [failed](#) to adequately address the escalating human rights violations in the country. As a result, the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) [deferred](#) the NHRCI's re-accreditation for the second consecutive time in 2024, until it is brought fully in line with the criteria laid down by the UN Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles).

The Indian government also continues to legislate [discriminatory laws](#) and weaponize existing laws against religious minorities. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, that came into effect in March 2024, discriminates against Muslims, making religion the basis for citizenship. The CAA, coupled with the Indian government's push for a nationwide citizenship verification process through a National Population Register and a proposed National Register of Citizens aimed at identifying "illegal migrants," has heightened fears that millions of Indian Muslims could be stripped of their citizenship rights and disenfranchised.

The Freedom of Religion Act (also known as “anti-conversion laws”) are enforced in ten of India’s 28 states, forbidding forced religious conversion. These laws have been used by the authorities to harass religious minorities, especially Christians from Dalit and Adivasi communities, and have emboldened vigilante violence.

In addition to misusing laws, Indian authorities also resort to various extra-judicial means to punish Muslims. Various state governments led by the BJP have adopted punitive demolitions as a *de facto* state policy which was [condemned recently](#) by the Supreme Court of India in November 2024.

The situation in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir remains repressive, with journalists and human rights defenders regularly detained under the UAPA and the PSA and facing systematic restrictions on their freedom of movement both within and outside the country. Similarly, over 20 months since the start of ethnic violence in [Manipur](#) state, the BJP-led federal government and Manipur state government have utterly failed to end the violence and displacement and to protect human rights in the state. As a result, at least 258 people [have died in Manipur](#) as of 31 December 2024.

The Indian government uses technology as part of its broadening crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. India continues to [impose the largest number of internet shutdowns](#) globally, often to shut down protests or criticism of the government. This in turn [disproportionately hurts communities](#) living with poverty that depend on the government’s social protection measures for food and livelihoods, as the “Digital India” program has made regular internet access vital for delivering key public services.

In addition, the [Personal Data Protection Act](#), [Information Technology Act](#) and related rules empower the authorities to undermine privacy safeguards and block online content, and enable unchecked state surveillance. India has also been [implicated in using Pegasus](#), the spyware produced by the Israel-based company NSO Group, to target activists and political opponents.

Several [foreign governments accused Indian officials](#) of targeting terrorism suspects and separatist leaders for assassination in Canada, the United States and Pakistan. In October 2024, Canada’s national police service [issued a public statement](#) on the alleged role of Indian state agents in criminal activity on Canadian soil, including homicide, extortion and other violence. Indian authorities have [canceled visas or denied entry to government critics](#), including members of the diaspora.

Despite very serious abuses and worrying authoritarian and repressive trends, the EU has yet to publicly express its concerns over the human rights crisis in India. Concerns are allegedly raised privately, including most recently during the local bilateral human rights dialogue in Delhi in January 2025, followed by a vaguely worded [joint press release](#) foregrounding “shared commitments and values”. We also note that the most recent EU-India human rights dialogue took place after two prior attempts in December 2023 and in [August 2024](#) failed to materialize, and that civil society in India and in Europe was not consulted in its preparation.

As the College of Commissioners prepares to meet Indian counterparts, our organizations urge you to seize this important opportunity to robustly engage on human rights, making the following recommendations to the Indian authorities:

- Immediately release all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights and/or drop all baseless charges against human rights defenders, activists and journalists, including [Khurram Parvez](#); detained journalists [Irfan Mehraj](#) and [Majid Hyderi](#); the activists in the Bhima Koregaon case; and the activists, students, and opposition politicians detained or charged in relation to the communal violence in Delhi in February 2020.
- Amend or reform restrictive legislation, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Foreign Contributions (Regulations) Act (FCRA), to comply with international human rights standards.

- Establish an independent, impartial and transparent investigation into ongoing killings by ethnic groups and security forces in Manipur.
- Repeal the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA), the National Security Act (NSA) and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. In parallel, ensure that military personnel suspected of having committed serious human rights violations are brought to justice in fair trials before civilian courts.
- End discriminatory policies and practices, and ensure prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into unlawful violence, including gender-based violence, against minorities and persons from marginalized groups, including Dalits and Adivasis. The Prime Minister should publicly and unequivocally condemn any discrimination or attacks on minorities and other marginalized persons, including by party leaders and supporters, and commit to end any bias in investigating and prosecuting such attacks.
- Cease efforts to censor and control independent media through the introduction of repressive laws and efforts to regulate content on digital platforms that disproportionately limit free speech and undermine journalistic independence, including by repealing the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- Stop targeting foreign journalists with retaliatory administrative measures such as shortening visas, denying work permits or revoking residency permits. Their ability to report on matters of public interest should not be unduly restricted.
- End broad, indiscriminate and harmful internet shutdowns, ensuring any internet restrictions comply with the requirements of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination and are limited in temporal scope, and that every shutdown order is published in line with Indian Supreme Court directives.
- Investigate serious allegations of transnational repression, including credible allegations that Indian agents have engaged in online disinformation campaigns against academics and activists in foreign countries.
- Ensure accountability for human rights violations, taking concrete and timely steps to implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee, GANHRI, FATF and India's [accepted recommendations](#) at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and urgently addressing [concerns](#) at multilateral level regarding the human rights situation on India.

The EU should be clear that progress on bilateral relations will be linked to concrete and measurable progress on these pressing issues, and design the planned [Strategic EU-India Agenda](#) accordingly, to ensure that human rights remain at the very heart of relations with India.

We thank you in advance for your action for human rights in India and welcome the opportunity to exchange further with you in near future.

Amnesty International

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee to Protect Journalists

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights Watch

International Dalit Solidarity Network

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

REDRESS

Reporters sans frontières (RSF)

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)