KANDHAMAL
THREE MONTHS AFTER THE COMMUNAL CARNAGE
“Society cannot exist with hatred and mistrusts among its members. These people had been living in perfect harmony as brothers and sisters a few months ago, but today they can’t see one another eye to eye. We need to start a process of conflict resolution among the communities in Kandhamal area so that they can live together peacefully like ever before”, opined Rev. Dr. Enos Das Pradhan, General Secretary, Synod of the Church of North India during his recent visit to Phulbani Diocese. Rt. Rev. Dr. C. K. Das, Bishop of Sambalpur Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. Samson Das, Bishop of Cuttack Diocese and Mr. Sudipta Singh, Director Programmes accompanied him during the three days of visit. During his visits, Rev. Pradhan took a stock of the destruction caused by the fundamentalists to the Church buildings and houses of Christians. He visited the ransacked churches and houses of families that were devastated by the miscreants and listened to their stories of awe and agony.

Rev. Pradhan was apprised of the incident by the local people, the eye-witness and riot survivors who revealed the facts and figures indicating that India’s largest spate of anti-Christian violence, which has rendered thousands homeless in Orissa’s Kandhamal district, was pre-planned and well organized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Escorted by four Police vans arranged by the District Administration, Rev. Dr. Pradhan visited the Relief Camps and spent time with the victims. All the victims came to meet him with tears and described their pain and agony. He listened to their plight and saw the inhuman condition where they are forced to live. More than three to four families are forced to live in a small tent which does not have adequate space. In the night there is no electricity. The victims are still living with utmost fear of
attacks in the darkness of night. The most affected are the children. They have lost already one academic year but more than that they have lost all hope in their lives and future. They are not able to go to school being apprehensive of further attacks. They do not have space to study though some NGOs have donated books and study materials. The Relief which Government used to provide has stopped. Even after three months it was shocking to see how the victims are living in tremendous traumatic and unhygienic condition. After hearing their plight Rev. Pradhan requested the community to have faith in Almighty and prayerfully plan in restoring lives in Kandhamal area. He appealed to the community to take part in reconstruction process and assured all possible help from the Synod of the Church of North India.

During his visit Rev. Pradhan challenged the members of the congregations to reopen the destroyed churches and start worshipping in the destroyed church buildings only. The leaders of the community accepted the challenge and promised to clean all the debris and start worshipping in the broken and demolished church buildings. He also demanded the implementation of the recommendation of the National Commission for Minorities.

After the visits in riot affected areas Rev. Pradhan had meetings with leaders of the community and also the Phulbani Diocesan Executive Committee to chalk out long term reconstruction plan for the area.
I am sixty five years old and the suffering of 25th December was more than enough for me and my young daughters. Little did we know that more pain and greater loss was waiting for us the following day. Barkhama being a small village doesn’t find a place in the map of Orissa, but the wonderful land chose the people of this tiny place to be His witness for the future generation.

The village was almost deserted after the violence of the Christmas day. Those who stayed back in the village were unhappy as they missed their neighbours and friends. My family members and I stayed back in hope that the situation become normal and we didn’t eat a morsel of food for the last twenty four hours. I sent my daughter to the nearby well to fetch water but after few minutes she came back running with the empty pitcher. She was speechless and trembling as she saw a huge mob torched the houses of every Christian living there. I saw young and old running towards the forest and compelled me to leave the place as soon as possible.

With courage I stood face to face with the crowed and asked “How long will you continue this violence”; they replied with a loud voice “Till all the Christians are wiped out”. Today I pity them for their ignorance because Christians die but not faith; they set my home on fire and left the place. In a moment fire consumed everything valuable, beginning from pets and pans to the paddy. The whole years toil and sweating went in vain in a heap of ashes. God puts His children in trials and tribulations so that they will come out purified and transparent like pure gold. We were Christians but the suffering has made us true believers in our Lord.
TESTIMONY OF GANGA DIGAL

I had seen the life for fifty three years and equal numbers of Christmas celebrations at Barkhamba. The spirit of Christmas was never less in spite of the people’s inability to make both ends meet. Our hardship & struggle for survival never hampered the joy of our heart. This year all of us expected a huge gathering as believers of all the denominations had decided to hold the devotional service under one roof- it was a noble attempt of the church leaders for unity and strength.

The name of BJP, RSS and Bajarang Dal were not well known to us as we had very little time to think about all these and little did we knew through their leader Laxmanananda Saraswati, that they were the people working against God’s children. Our poverty didn’t allow us to know about them through T.V. and newspapers. Now we know they are men made organizations that break human relationship instead of building it up. I praise the name of the Lord for not making me a part of it.
It was 2:00PM on 25th December in the middle of the Christmas service we could hear a huge crowd getting closer to the place of worship. They were all members of BJP and other Hindu organizations who were waiting for an opportunity to break the peace of our life.

Before the armed crowd, we were helpless and totally paralised with fear. The first thing they did was to demolish the temple of our Lord and broke all that they found near their hands. They didn’t leave a single church undamaged and before our eyes they brought down one after another and cried with joy for their glorious achievements. In the fraction of few minutes nothing was left, excepting heaps of debris, all our hopes, happiness of life was buried under it. The whole congregation got scattered and ran to save their lives, some ran towards the nearby forest and we didn’t see them in the village for days together.

The 26th December was a black day in the history of Barkhamba. As it yesterday’s destruction was not sufficient, the fundamentalists were back once again with more people and arms to destroy our dwelling places that we had built up with years of struggle and hardship. Within no time they demolished almost all Christian houses and took away all valuables, all of a sudden we found ourselves under the open sky, roofless, lonely and totally devastated and broken. Our eyes were filled with tear and we couldn’t see our future for all of us everything was lost.

In fear I had crossed the main road and entered the nearby forest. Little did I know that greater suffering was waiting for me in the midst of darkness in the forest. Unfortunately, I confronted three strong and stout men who began to chase me to take my life. I ran far more than three kilometers till I was totally exhausted, my old age and weak body didn’t let me run any further. So I turned back and knelt before them with folded hands and begged for mercy and kindness. I appealed them to spare my life for my family and children. It was the saddest day of my life as I had to fold my hands before my Father’s enemies. They didn’t pay heed to my request but wounded me with an axe till I became unconscious. They left the place thinking that I was dead. On coming to sense, I could realize how painful it was to lose one’s own blood. I was reminded of my Lord’s suffering on the cross who gave His blood till nothing was left.

I tried to get up but couldn’t so I crawled but suddenly I felt two persons were holding me. They helped me to reach my home and my wife was with me to share my suffering of life. When there was no medicine and bandage, she tore her only petticoat to tie up my wounds. She took me to the Baliguda hospital and I had to stay in the hospital for a fortnight till the doctors refused to provide anymore medicine. I came back to my broken house to begin a new phase of life because life has to go on.

The people who made me bleed were my neighbours and friends till yesterday. Now I see them frequently on the roads of Barkhama, but the thought of revenge never comes to my mind. Silence is meaningful and valuable and I am sure my silence will teach them the basics of Christianity – Love and Forgiveness.

Now I am a silent preacher.
PLIGHT OF PLABAN DIGAL A STUDENT OF INTERMEDIATE ADIVASI COLLEGE

History, they say, repeats itself. I knew the children of God suffering in the hands of the atheists, but never expected to witness the same at the tender age of 22. What I write here not part of fiction, but reality experienced and deeply felt at the core of my heart.

It was the midday of 25th December, a time of celebration and jubilation with the near and dear ones. The whole year’s expectation to behold the faces of ones own people ends with reunion and tears of joy. But this year was a bit different. Since the senior pastor of the church lost his mother, the joy in the air was a bit less but not totally lost. The afternoon service began little late.

In the middle of the worship, the silence was broken by the loud cry of a group of strangers, fully armed ready to destroy anything whatever comes on their way. It was like the cold breeze before the real cyclonic storm. It is said that the fear of death makes one stronger, so was with all of us; all of a sudden strength gripped our voices we began to sing louder, our tone seemed to vibrate but not broken. Our bodies became cold and stiff but eyes wide open looking to the cross on the front wall. I felt the cross has a voice of its own that speaks us never to look back. The group vanished for a while.

Time moved on it was nearing 3.30 and the atmosphere was dark and gloomy. Words were insufficient to express my feelings. I never knew so much fear in my life and the anticipation of more danger made all of us totally dumb though the heart beat grew faster and faster.

All of a sudden the hell broke loose when a huge mob with weapons entered in to the church and began to destroy everything they saw. At this moment the Lord guided some elders of the village to approach the mob bravely and make a peaceful solution. They turned a deaf ear, instead they called more people from Baliguda to help them in the mission of destruction. They not only broke but torched houses, shops and everything valuable they got near their hands. Within few minutes the whole area turned in to a heap of ashes. People lost their whole year’s savings, their livelihood and the future for them was uncertain. I too lost my chicken shop in fire and with it my whole business.
In fear most of us ran towards the nearby forest to take shelter in its thick darkness and with me I dragged my old and frail grandfather who was unable to stand. He could hardly understand what was going on.

I allowed some time to pass and the situation to subside. I slowly came out of the forest crossed the roads and moved towards my village where I was born and brought up. But I was wrong, I was again chased by a huge crowd and I ran towards the foot of a nearby hill and climb over it to save my life. There I was united some more villagers and there we spent two long days and nights with the sky above us. We had no food and the pangs of hunger were unbearable.

Broken and devastated, we walked to a village of Mohangiri but were refused any help.

We spent a fortnight at Budhipadar in the midst of some Hindus who were kind enough and helpful. At last came the time of homecoming. Our homes were heaps of ashes with lines of smoke coming out of it. We lost many things but all was not lost.

Now as I continue my life in the relief camps, I can only pray to the almighty that let our latter days be more blessed than the beginning.
What Happened Earlier

The festive mood of Christmas in December 2007 didn’t last in Orissa’s Kandhamal district till the celebration. Impelled by the preaching of Swami Lakhanananda Saraswati, a preacher of Hindutva who has been simmering hatred and targeted violence against Christians in the district, his supporters went on the rampage in whole of Kandhamal attacking churches, prayer halls, police posts, houses and vehicles just on the eve of Christmas. About 10 churches and prayer halls in Baliguda, Nuagaon, Chakapada and Phiringia were torched and ransacked.

The minority Christian community in Kandhamal district, many of whom are forest tribal people and low-caste Dalit converts from Hinduism to Christianity, has been targeted by radical Hindu nationalist organisations seeking to put an end to the church and its activities in the region.

As the violence gradually spread its pang, district administration declared curfew immediately in four major towns like Brahmanigaon, Daringbadi, Baliguda, Phulbani and some other places of the district which seemed vulnerable to the impact of ongoing communal riot. Christmas party celebration in the state of Orissa was thus spoiled. This is the first time in Orissa that Church services could not be held on a Christmas day at many places in Kandhamal despite strong police
presence. Ever since violence broke out at least five people have been killed and 53 churches, most of them small mud and thatch buildings, along with 800 houses have been razed.

The State Government as a damage-control measure had restricted the entry of outsiders to the riot-hit areas which discouraged many of the fact-finding teams to make an on-the-spot assessment of loss of lives and properties.

Around nine people had been killed, close to 90 churches burnt, about 600 houses torched or vandalized, and 5,000 people affected. And a large number of Christian villagers were displaced and had to live in refugee camps eating boiled rice not fit for human consumption because of the quantity of sand and grit, and living in the cold.

Earlier the CNI Bishops in Orissa along with other Church leaders had met the State Governor and Chief Minisater, Union Home Minister and submitted a memorandum as a result of which the State Government has announced that the families whose houses had been burnt down by the attackers would be provided with one dwelling unit each under the Indira Awas Yojana, a government scheme to provide housing. Those whose houses had been damaged partially would get Rs. 10,000 each as compensation. The next of kin of those killed in the violence would be given Rs. 1 lakh each as ex-gratia from the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund.
CNI’S RESPONSE TO KANDHAMAL RIOT

A. CNI DEMANDS IMPLEMENTATION OF NCM RECOMMENDATIONS

CNI demands from the State Government to release a White Paper and Action Taken Report on the Ten Points Recommendation made by the National Commission for Minorities. (The NCM Report is attached)

B. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

CNI urged the State Government to start a process of Conflict resolution in the society and expressed its willingness to assist the Government in holding Conflict Management to reduce the tension in the area for establishment of Communal Harmony.

C. PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION

The Communal riot in Kandhmal has left in its wake communities that need to be rebuilt. The impact is on life, the livelihood, and the property but most importantly the impact is on the way people think, feel, act and relate with each other. This psychological impact has direct effect and an indirect effect. The direct impact is the increased psychological morbidity amongst victims and the indirect effect is due to the increased vulnerability (gender and caste based), decreased accessibility of the relief and rehabilitation process. The communities are fragment, the individual within the communities is alienated and the identity of each survivor questioned by their traumatic experience. The process of rebuilding of people's identities needs to be restored.

Through this intervention we will facilitate the communities to rediscover themselves and thrive again on their resilience. It aims to sensitively integrate the interventions for psychosocial impact of the disaster at the individual and community level with all relief and rehabilitation measures being provided by the non-governmental processes and local governmental. These interventions will be focused on community at large but will be inclusive of addressing needs of those who are more vulnerable and ensure that they are able to access the rehabilitation process.

D. COMMUNITY STUDY CENTRES

The complexities that have emerged out of the devastating effect of the riot are vast. The need is pressing, and the impact on the child is huge and deep. The child has lost – his/her home, school, books, friends, parents, loved ones, and even his/her favourite toy. The loss is irreplaceable, but surely can be substituted.

The Church of North India plans to work for and with children by engaging the community to rebuild the lives of the children through an integrated child development programme. The programme aims towards meeting the holistic development of children of the community, which includes meeting the educational, psycho-social, cultural, physical, spiritual and intellectual needs of the children.
The programme will be implemented through the Community Study Centres (CSC) in each of the Relief Camp. For a child, the CSC is a way between his/her school and home. This is where a child can play, can recreate, express, vent out suppressed feelings, get over the trauma and shock that the disaster has left on his/her mind, overcome the fear of losing, and look forward for a life with meaning, hope and direction. The CSC will have a plan for each child, to enable a child to learn, re-learn and apply learning’s into practice, ranging from enabling the child to study, to retain their culture and traditional values, to develop and grow, and to participate in the development process of self and community.

E. HOSTEL FOR GIRLS’ IN SUNAPANGA

CNI believes that education is a process of development of an individual, and through an individual that of a community. Education is not an achievement in itself, it is a process that leads to the realisation both of the known and the unknown, it is a process of discoveries and re-discoveries, and is liberative and developmental in nature. CNI also decided to start a Girls’ Hostel for the victims of Riot in Sunapanga.

F. RENOVATION OF 19 CHURCH BUILDING

During the riot 19 church buildings of CNI was affected. To help the believers to worship, the CNI has decided to Repair all the 19 Church Buildings.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MINORITIES

Report of the NCM visit to Orissa, 6-8 January 2008

A semblance of normality appears to be returning to the violence hit districts of Orissa. The reasons for the outbreak of violence on the eve of Christmas are far more varied than was apparent from media reports, but there is no doubt that the Christian community and its places of worship were the principal target of attack. They bore the brunt of violence and suffered the maximum damage. As a result, the Christian community continues to live in fear and feels insecure and unsafe. It may take months and even years to restore their confidence. This will depend, above all, on the State Government’s ability and willingness to address both the immediate and long term issues that were responsible for the violence. This is the overall conclusion reached by the NCM delegation. Members Zoya Hasan and Dileep Padgaonkar visited Orissa from 6-8 January 2008. During their stay in Bhubaneshwar and visit to Phulbani in Kandhmala district, the Members met a cross-section of political, civil society, religious groups and organizations and the affected people. The team held meetings with district officials engaged in restoring peace and normality in the disturbed areas. They apprised the team of the measures taken by the administration in the past two weeks to restore peace. In the State capital the Members met the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, DG (P) and other senior officials before calling on the Chief Minister. The team also paid a courtesy call on the Governor.
Several factors were at work and converged to create tension and violence which started on 24th December 2007 and continued until 27th December 2007. The long simmering Kondh-Pana Conflict was in part responsible for the agitation and violence. The Kondhs are Scheduled Tribes (STs) who constitute 51.96 percent of the population in Kandhmal district, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) (many of whom are Pana) are 16.89 percent, and Christians are 18.20 percent. A section of Christian Panas have been seeking inclusion in the ST category which would entitle them to the benefits of reservation. Their demand is based on their linguistic and cultural affinities with the Kui group. However, the Kuis have been resisting this demand on the ground that they were ethnically different from the Panas. This issue has been complicated by the High Court order of July 12, 2007. An NGO filed a petition in the High Court demanding ST status for the Panas on the ground that the amended Presidential Order of 2002 shows Kui community as ST and as Pana caste speaks the Kui dialect. Therefore their caste should be changed from Pana as entioned in the revenue records to ST. The court order directed the Government to look into matter and make the necessary corrections in the record of land rights as per the Presidential Order 2002. Soon after the High Court Order was given the Phulbani Kui Jan Kalyan Sangh started a campaign that all those recorded as SC Pana in the revenue records will now be treated as STs. The Kui Samaj Sewa Samiti of Phulbani and several other Kui organizations reacted by organizing rallies and processions demanding the deletion of Kui from the Presidential Order. But there are other reasons which Kuis cite which are that taking advantage of their illiteracy etc the Panas have acted as middle men to exploit them notably by grabbing their lands. The Kuis also allege that SC Christians obtain false certificates as Hindu SCs to take the benefits of reservations. It should be noted that the SC category excludes Christians whereas they are entitled to inclusion in the ST category and the reservation benefits that go with it. Hence the efforts of some Christians groups to get included in the ST category. The Government is presently conducting an inquiry into these charges and has informed the NCM about that the culprits would be speedily brought to book. It has also been alleged that SC Christians have reconverted to Hinduism while continuing to practice their Christian faith with a view to availing the benefits given to the SCs.

A second, if not more important factor, is the anti-conversion campaign conducted by the VHP and the Sangh Parivar organizations for the past few years. The campaign has aimed to prevent the conversion of tribal and Dalits to Christianity. Swami Saraswati Lakshmanda, the leader of the anti-conversion campaign, established an Ashram in this area in 1969 and has opened educational institutions for tribal boys and girls. The 1991 Census shows the Christians constituted 75597 of the population of Kandhmal district whereas in the 2001 Census their population had gone up to 117950. While the increase in population in percentage terms is substantial, there is no evidence whatsoever that this increase occurred under duress or on account of inducement to conversion. A stringent law regarding conversion the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act has been on the statute books for the past four decades. The NCM Members asked both district officials and senior officials in the State Secretariat whether any cases had been reported or filed with regard to infringement of this law over the past 10 years. Not one incident of forcible conversion was cited or adduced. We also inquired from the Church representatives whether they keep a register of conversions. Such a register is a routine practice at the time of baptism. The Church representatives confirmed that they indeed maintained such a register.
But no one has apparently bothered to check it. In fact the Archbishop of Bhubaneswvar told the NCM team that neither he nor anyone in the Diocese was ever summoned by the authorities with regard to matters relating to conversion. From the above the NCM team has inferred that there is no basis whatsoever to justify the anti-conversion campaign. On the other hand, this mischievous campaign has created an atmosphere of prejudice and suspicion against the Christian community and Christian priests and organizations. The role of the Sangh Parivar activists and the anti-conversion campaign in fomenting organized violence against the Christian community deserves close scrutiny. This is especially urgent in view of the official explanation to the effect fact that the recent incidents in Orissa are largely of an ethnic nature rather than motivated by an anti-minority intent. The NCM team noticed that there was a concerted effort on the part of government officials to evade and prevaricate on the communal dimension of the conflict and to explain the violence in terms of the Kondh-Pana conflict. The NCM team discussed in detail the chronology of events with all its interlocutors. The responses were far from uniform because of the endeavor of groups consulted to engage in a blame game. However, the team has been able to construct a factual account of the tragic turn of events. As early as 22nd December the Church authorities informed the Sub-Collector that they apprehended trouble on Christmas and asked the district administration to take the necessary measures to prevent anti-social elements from exploiting the situation to create the trouble. Church authorities informed the Sub-Collector that the Kui Samaj had given a call for a bandh on 25-26 December to press their demands regarding various issues. They requested the district authorities to remain alert and preempt any trouble. On 24 December a group of 150-200 people started demanding that an arch put across the road by Christians should be removed in Brahmanigaon even though the Christian community had received official permission for putting up the pandal and for the use of loud speakers. The district administration confirmed the grant of permission. Two reasons were advanced to halt work on the arches and pandal. (i) It would affect business. (ii) The pandal was sought to be erected on the very site used by the Hindus to celebrate the Durga Puja festival in October. Protestors then sought to close the weekly market on 24 December. They also tried to close all the shops in the area. The Christian shopkeepers refused to comply which led to an altercation between the two sides. More than 20 shops were looted and destroyed in the forenoon of 24 December. Two shots fired in the air created a panic and people ran helter skelter. Police officers and the Collector arrived on the scene to help sort out the issue. Even as they were making these efforts news came in of an attack on the vehicle carrying Swami Lakshamanda to Brahmanigaon by a group of Christian youths. This inflamed the majority community even though the nature and scale of injuries sustained by the Swami is yet to be established. From this point the situation took a turn for the worse. The very fact that the Swami was on his way to Brahmanigaon to raise the “morale of the majority community” is indicative of his desire to exacerbate communal tensions. Meanwhile the Kui tribes people felled close to 2000 trees on the roads leading to the district to prevent Shri Padmanabha Behera, Minister for Steel and Mines, from taking his supporters to Bhubaneswvar where a massive rally was to be held for celebrating 10 years of BJD. Shri Behera belongs to SC Pana and has been the target of opposition of the Kui Samaj leaders and has since then resigned. There is a long history to this conflict and the rivalry goes back to 1994 when large scale mobilization of Kuis by Lambodhar Konhar had taken place culminating in widespread clashes and violence. But the NCM team was given other reasons for blocking of roads. This was to prevent the police from reaching those places where Christian churches, prayer halls, convents, were being targeted by miscreants. This raises several important questions which remain unanswered by the official account. How can so many trees have been
felled within a matter of hours without planning, organization and large numbers of people involved in felling? Why were the state intelligence agencies not aware of the felling of trees which is against the law? The answers received by the NCM team to these questions were far from convincing. Nor could they tell the team of the extent of complicity between Kui tribes and the VHP. One senior Kui leader regretted that the Sangh Parivar had used the leadership of the tribals for its own ends. Another leader acknowledged that the VHP had penetrated the ranks of the Kui Samaj and always put them in front in such conflicts. Before the VHP’s anti-conversion campaign the tribal Christians and non-Christians had lived in harmony but the Parivar’s efforts had succeeded in creating a chasm. It must be remembered that Swami Lakshmanda has been working among the STs since 1969 when he established his base here. He enjoys a big following in this area and Christians allege that there is some degree of complicity between the tribal leaders and Sangh Parivar outfits. Attacks took place in various places between 24-27 December. We were informed that Christian properties destroyed in these incidents include parish churches, village churches, convents, presbyteries, hostels, a vocational training centre, a leprosy centre, and scores of shops and houses. Incidentally Hindu owned properties were also destroyed though the number is a fraction of the losses sustained by Christians. The Orissa Government is yet to give its full assessment of the damage. Three persons were killed: one Christian, one Hindu while the identity of the third is yet to be established. Destruction on such a large scale in places which are difficult to access could not have taken place without advance preparation and planning. The manpower and logistics required to damage so many Christian properties is immense. We visited an NGO and a Revenue Inspectors office on our return to Bhubaneshwar. The RI office was completely gutted which indicated a high level of planning and use of incendiary materials in the attack. The sense of insecurity runs deep in the Christian community. As many of them were left with nothing except the clothes they were wearing. Children and women including nuns had to seek refuge in the forests. The Government has provided some immediate relief.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Throughout the fact finding mission one question rose again and again and this was whether the choice of 25th December for holding a bandh by the Kuis was a mere coincidence. A second bandh called by Swami Lakshmananda to protest the attack on his car was also fixed for the same day. We find it difficult to believe that this too was entirely fortuitous. The authorities were warned well in advance by the Christians that trouble was brewing during the Christmas season. In this background it is extremely difficult to understand why the district authorities did not take active steps to defuse the situation and ensure that peace was maintained.

2. The official accounts sought to stress the complexity of the situation in Kandhamal district and attributed the violence to the confusion over the High Court Order on the inclusion of SC Christians in the ST category which is vehemently opposed by the Kui tribes in the area. The situation is certainly complex and overlaid with multi-layered contradictions. The conflation of castetribe-communal issues has contributed to the aggravation of social conflicts in this area. But none of this complexity detracts from the principal issue which is that the Christian minority was the target of organised attacks. The State agencies if they had been vigilant could have prevented the violence arising out of the two bandhs on Christmas.
3. The State Government must look into the speeches of Swami Lakshmananda to determine whether they amount to incitement to violence and take appropriate action.

4. The State Government must issue a White Paper on the conversion issue to dispel fears and suspicions that have been assiduously raised about the Christian community and the role of its institutions.

5. Rehabilitation package announced by the Orissa Government needs to be reviewed to provide rehabilitation keeping in view the actual loss suffered by the victims of violence.

6. Augmenting the number of police personnel and providing them with adequate training and equipment was also imperative. Moreover for reasons that have not been explained the State Government was reluctant in reaching out to civil society and NGOs working as they do work at the grassroots can provide authorities with advance information about simmering tension and co-operate in the prevention of such incidents.

7. Orissa does not have a State Minorities Commission. The State Government must take the necessary steps to set up a statutory Minorities Commission for safeguarding the rights of minorities.

8. The confusion created by the High Court Order needs to be swiftly cleared to prevent further outbreak of tensions between STs and SCs. The government must address the obvious tensions that will arise from the different treatment given in the matter of reservation to Christians belonging to the SC community and the ST community. If Christian tribals are backward Christian SCs are no less so. To create an artificial distinction between the two is simply to communalise poverty and drive a wedge between two homogenous groups who are among the most deprived. The group therefore, recommends that the reservation given to Christian tribals should be extended to cover Christian SCs who are of exactly the same background and are subject to exactly the same disadvantage.

9. None of the above must detract from the social and economic backwardness of the district. Every indicator points to acute poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, lack of infrastructure, in short, an absence of development. Nearly two thirds of the people in this district live below the poverty line. Even as the authorities are called upon to show greater vigilance to prevent the outbreak of violence, the Government must urgently address issues of social exclusion and structural inequities.

10. The terrible fact remains that in parts of Orissa Christians were unable to celebrate their most important festival. By preventing Christians from celebrating Christmas, the VHP and its affiliates have ensured that the minority should not be in a position to enjoy the rights guaranteed to it by the Constitution. The action of such forces is blot on the Republic a matter which deserves more attention and consideration from authorities both at the level of State and Centre.