

# Christian couple beaten by mob at police station in India

January 26, 2024

KARNATAKA, India (BP)—A 300-person mob beat and threatened to kill a Christian couple at a police station in Karnataka State, India, after the wife was falsely accused of forced conversion, Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported Jan. 23.

Uppaladinni village residents Vijayalakshmi Chavhan and her husband Ashok were beaten, while police feigned an inability to stop the attack, sources told CSW.

“This is part of a growing trend of social hostility towards religious minorities across India, which the authorities must address as a matter of utmost urgency,” CSW founding president Mervyn Thomas said.

“CSW is concerned for the Christians in Uppaladinni who have been singled out, harassed and attacked on account of their beliefs.”

Religious conversions are criminalized in Karnataka and 11 other states in the majority Hindu country, punishable by years-long prison sentences and monetary fines.

## Dramatic increase in religious persecution

Spiking persecution of Christians in India has led religious liberty advocacy groups to urge the U.S. State Department to [designate India a Country of Particular Concern](#) for systematic, ongoing and egregious religious liberty violations.

In Uppaladinni, villagers accused Chavhan of forced conversion because she was a Christian and government health care worker who routinely entered homes to conduct community outreach.

As the accusations spread across the community, the couple was attacked when police brought them and other villagers to the police station to resolve the situation. Villagers tried to get Chavhan fired from her job, which police have assured her is secure.

The couple's condition after the beating was not reported, but police arrested six men identified as members of the Banjara community, a semi-nomadic Indigenous tribe. Such violence often is attributed to Hindutva radicals, Open Doors US said in its 2024 World Watch List that describes India as the 11th most dangerous place for Christians.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and multiple advocacy groups have [requested a congressional hearing](#) to advocate for the designation of India—as well as Nigeria—as a CPC. The commission cited anti-conversion laws, mob attacks, sexual violence and harassment of religious minorities, as well as laws employed to disenfranchise religious minorities of their Indian citizenship.

On Jan. 17, nearly 40 religious liberty advocates and groups joined ICC in a letter to Congress decrying the omission of India and Nigeria from the 2024 list of CPCs. The advocates cited India's anti-conversion laws in their appeal.

## **Anti-conversion laws widespread**

In addition to Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, anti-conversion laws exist and are variously enforced in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, the U.S. Commission on International

Religious Freedom said in a March 2023 update.

Other states are considering passing such laws, the commission said, while courts have ordered some states to pause enforcement.

Violence against Christians has also increased in India, Open Doors US reported, with killings rising from 17 in 2022 to 160 in 2023; 2,228 churches attacked or closed in 2023, up from 67 in 2022; the private property of 5,878 Christians damaged or confiscated in 2023, up from 180 in 2022; and 62,119 Christians displaced in 2023, compared to 834 in 2022.

Hindus comprise 71.8 percent of India's 1.4 billion population, followed by Muslims with 14.9 percent, Christians with 5 percent, and 3.7 percent described as ethno-religious, Open Doors US reported, citing March 2023 figures from the World Christian database.

The police station mob violence was among ongoing harassment of Christians this month in Uppaladinni village, CSW said.

The local utility service cut electrical power and water to the homes of three families who attend church with the Chavhans, leaving them without utilities at least four days and publicly warning them they would be killed if they continued to follow Jesus. Chavhan continues to receive death threats, sources told CSW.