

# USCIRF: India's anti-conversion laws violate human rights

March 14, 2023

India's anti-conversion laws violate international human rights standards and worsen already-poor religious freedom conditions in India, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom stated.

"India's state-level anti-conversion laws violate international human rights law's protections for the right to freedom of religion or belief," the commission concluded in a report issued March 14.

Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, worship and observance."

India's laws "impermissibly limit and punish an individual's right to convert and right to persuade or support another individual to convert voluntarily," the commission report states.

Anti-conversion laws "enable and embolden existing government harassment, vigilante violence, and discrimination against religious minorities, as well as crackdowns on civil society organizations," the report notes.

"[Issue Update: India's State-level Anti-conversion Laws](#)" reports 12 of India's 28 states have legislation that criminalizes religious conversions: Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

“An increasingly common feature of India’s state-level anti-conversion laws are provisions aimed at preventing so-called ‘Love Jihad,’ a derogatory term for conversions occurring in the context of interfaith marriages,” the report states.

Anti-conversion laws in 10 Indian states require individuals who intend to convert, individuals involved in the conversion plan of someone else, or both, to notify the government.

For example, the anti-conversion law in Karnataka State required the district magistrate, once notified of an individual’s intent to convert, to issue a public call for any objections to the conversion. If an objection is lodged, it triggers an official government investigation.

If the conversion is found to violate any provision of the state’s Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, the matter is referred to police to initiate criminal action.

Seven Indian states provide that the burden of proof for violations of anti-conversion laws lies on the person who is accused, even though international human rights law prohibit the presumption of guilt for accused individuals.

“Repealing India’s state-level anti-conversion laws is necessary to comply with international human rights law for the right to freedom of religion or belief and to help prevent the country’s religious freedom conditions from further deteriorating,” the commission report concludes.

In its [2022 annual report](#), the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended the U.S. Department of State designate India as a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act.