



## Rights Activists Express Concern About the Increasing Prevalence of Anti-Muslim Attacks in India

Rights activists have expressed concern about the increasing prevalence of anti-Muslim attacks in India, with many observers pointing out that the calls for such violence is spreading from the fringes to the mainstream throughout the country. A significant increase in attacks has taken place since 2014, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party came to power. Disturbing headlines regarding the lynching of Muslims in India are now commonplace. Yati Narsinghanand, a bigoted Hindu monk and a prominent figure in the anti-Muslim movement, has held events repeatedly calling for violence against the Muslim population in India. He has even gone as far as calling for a genocidal campaign to "kill two million of them" and urged for further ethnic cleansing. Muslims make up roughly 15% of the population, and the goal of these radical extremists is to reshape India's constitutionally-secular republic into a Hindu state. What is especially troubling is the fact that political leaders and law enforcement officials seem to be apathetic, if not silently endorsing the extremists' actions. This lack of condemnation at anti-Muslim rhetoric has emboldened their behavior.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has done little to stop anti-Muslim sentiments and hate speech. Many rights organizations have accused Prime Minister Modi of looking the other way, partly for political reasons as he has relied on far-right groups to mobilize voters and secure electoral victories. He has continued to entrench this ideology in the government by picking Yogi Adityanath, a monk who has been accused of spurring vigilante violence, to lead Uttar Pradesh – India's largest state. Despite there being a significant uptick in anti-Muslim attacks, it is not a new phenomenon in India. One of the most alarming incidents took place back in 2002 when after a train fire killed 59 Hindu pilgrims, a violent mob blamed and targeted the Muslim community, killing more than 1,000 people. The problem is also that there have been very few who face repercussions for heinous crimes like this and other violent acts such as lynching. Gregory Stanton, the founder of Genocide Watch, has raised concerns, stating that it was similar circumstances that ultimately led to the massacre in Rwanda in the 1990s. Using Myanmar as an example, he outlined how easy it is for misinformation and hate speech on social media to lead to violence.

Narsinghanand has had a long history of inciting violence against Muslims, calling on his followers to be willing to die to stop what he sees as a "Muslim takeover in India." He claims that within a decade, India will become a Muslim state. His radical group also celebrates the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi, who is seen in their eyes as a Muslim appeaser. They have even outrageously reenacted Gandhi's assassination. Many of the ideologies held by Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, have been used as an inspiration for this rise in anti-Muslim fervor which has also led to an increase in vigilante violence. These criminals have harassed and assaulted interfaith couples, accusing Muslim men of "luring" Hindu women in order to convert them. During a months-long protest over a discriminatory citizenship amendment that targeted Muslims, Narsinghanand called on supporters to "finish them (the Muslim protesters) off." At least 50 people were killed in the ensuing riots, a majority of them being Muslim Indians.

Escalations in hate speech against Muslims in India cannot be allowed to continue, and is being rightfully denounced by freedom and social justice activists. The Modi government should be pressured to condemn anti-Muslim hate speech and take harsher actions against those inciting violence.