

Declaration of the 70th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of India

We, the members of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), gathered in Jagdalpur for our 70th Annual Convention, reaffirm our commitment to the spiritual and social welfare of our nation and all its people.

As the umbrella organization and central network for Evangelicals in India, representing over 65,000 churches across the country, we recognize our responsibility to address the challenges facing our community and our nation at large.

We celebrate the rich heritage of Christianity in India, which traces its roots to the apostolic era, making it as old as Christianity itself. For nearly two millennia, Christians have been an integral part of India's diverse tapestry, contributing significantly to nation-building through education, healthcare, social reform, and community service. We affirm that Christianity, far from being a foreign import, is deeply woven into the fabric of Indian society.

Our gathering in Jagdalpur, Bastar, is a testament to our solidarity with the Christian community in this region, where the Church has been present for approximately 150 years. We acknowledge the unique cultural identity of the tribal populations. Tribal identity is recognised in the Indian Constitution, and the rights of the people protected under law. It is distinct from religions the people may profess.

We share the concerns and challenges faced by tribal Christians in Chhattisgarh, particularly in the Bastar region. It grieves us to learn of incidents where our sisters and brothers have faced violence, social ostracism, and displacement from their homes and livelihoods due to their faith. We observe with heavy hearts the divisions that are being forced among tribal communities, which have historically lived in harmony. We call upon all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue to address these issues, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all individuals are respected, regardless of their religious beliefs.

We are anxious at the unabated violence in Manipur. For more than 500 days, attacks have continued, wrecking liberty, security and civil rights. In other states in India, the United Christian Forum reports that there are two attacks daily on Christians. We urge the authorities to address these issues promptly and ensure the safety and rights of all citizens, regardless of their faith.

Together with Civil Society and other minorities in the country, we note with concern the increasing stringency of anti-conversion laws, such as the recent amendment in Uttar Pradesh that extends punishments and broadens the scope for complaints. People fear such weaponisation of these controversial laws, which infringe upon the fundamental right of freedom of religion, could be misused to harass law-abiding citizens.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India is troubled by further attempts to marginalize Dalit Christians, as also the growing targeting of Adivasi (Tribal) communities. We stand in solidarity with their assertion of their Constitutional status and rights. We call for a renewed commitment to social justice and equality for all segments of society.

These challenges deepen our love for our country with its commitment to democracy and the progress and well-being of all citizens. We call upon all people of goodwill to join us in fostering peace, harmony, and mutual understanding among all communities.

As we look to the future with hope, which was also the theme of our convention, we pledge to continue our engagement in nation-building, promoting education, health, and social welfare. We extend our hand in friendship to all who share our vision of a united, prosperous, and inclusive India.

May God bless India and all its people.

Issued this 19th day of September, 2024, at Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, India.