



NORTH EAST CATHOLIC RESEARCH FORUM
C/O NEIRBC Secretariat, Inspiration Building,
Joypur, Kharguli, Guwahati - 781004 (Assam)
web:www.necarf.org, Email:info@necarf.org

March 3, 2024

A Memorandum
Submitted to Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma, Hon. Chief Minister, Assam

Respected Sir,

The North East Catholic Research Forum is a non-partisan organization that deeply cherishes the principles of freedom, justice, peace, harmony, and equality. We have followed your political journey with admiration, especially after assuming the role of Chief Minister of Assam. We appreciate your leadership quality and emergence as one of the prominent voices of our region, a politician who could speak with some authority, which is the need of the hour for a region that has long been neglected on many counts.

While we also acknowledge your efforts to push infrastructure development in the state of Assam, which has positively impacted other sister states, we are disappointed with your silence over certain developments where Christians and tribal people are targeted by certain organizations. We feel that such activities have the potential to not only create enmity between people but also disturb the peace in our region. We, therefore, urge your kind indulgence to reign down on these disturbing signs within the state of Assam since anything that happens in this state will always have a spill-over effect on others. We enumerate some significant ones below for your kind attention:

1. In December 2023, the Assam unit of the Janjati Dharam Suraksha Manch made an unreasonable demand that tribal people who have now become Christians should be delisted from the country's recognized list of Schedule Tribes. The call caused much anger, concern, and fear psychosis amongst many tribal Christians.
2. Recently, a Hindu outfit known as Kutumbha Surakshya Parishad has given a 15-day ultimatum to all Christian schools to remove Christian symbols, besides a call to priests and nuns to discontinue wearing cassocks and habits on the school campuses. The outfit also demanded that churches located within the complex be removed. It claims that this was taken up with the intention of "preventing Christian missionaries from using schools for conversion activities." This is without doubt a bizarre and baseless claim, but nevertheless a disturbing one, which is unprecedented.
3. In the same vein, one Satya Ranjan Borah, at a press conference in Guwahati on February 7, said, "Christian Missionaries are converting schools and educational



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institutes into religious institutes.” The group warned of dire consequences if Christian schools don’t stop “converting”. He also threatened that his organisation shall have no hesitation in storming into campuses if the authorities fail to comply. A poster campaign in this regard is underway.

4. Encouraged by such blatant accusations and warnings, a Christian Nun who was traveling in a bus between Goalpara and Dhudnoi was offloaded on February 17, 2024 by the conductor after she was jeered and mocked for her faith and her dress by the bus conductor and the passengers. The helpless woman was thus asked to get down from the bus in an isolated location, unmindful of her safety and security. The inhuman treatment subsequently attracted a discussion even in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, which only reinforces the seriousness of the incident.
5. The Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024, which was tabled in the House of the Assam Legislative Assembly on 21st February, 2024 has certain misleading terms like "magic healing" or "magical healing" which has the potential to be misinterpreted and criminalised. We suspect that these would certainly be used to target the Christian community as simple prayer services may also be interpreted as a healing sessions and action taken against people involved. Also these terms being made the soul of the above Bill, we see a deliberate attempt to discourage Christians from practising their faith.

Sir, Christians have significantly contributed to nation-building, particularly in education and social services. The inclusive nature of Christian institutes is noteworthy, with a majority of students being from the Hindu community. Though non-Christian students spend years studying in Christian schools and colleges, they remain Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs etc., which exemplifies that besides education, there are no other intentions. The allegation that these institutes are being used as centres of conversion, therefore, lacks merit.

Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the freedom of conscience, the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion to all citizens. It is this fundamental right that enables citizens to choose their faith, practice, and propagate without fear. We see no reason why a particular religion, namely Christianity, should be subjected to undue pressure in some of the states of North East region, above all, Assam, from where all other sister states of North East were created. We feel that such selective targeting jeopardizes peace, harmony, and peaceful co-existence.

We therefore humbly request you to please use your good offices to ensure that:

- a) People and organisations indulging in anti-Christian activities in the state of Assam are firmly dealt with, so that the venom of hatred doesn’t find a place in our societies.
- b) The district Civil and Police authorities be directed to promptly take cognizance of such activities and actions taken under the law for attempting to disturb peace and public order, and,



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- c) The use of controversial terms in the “Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024” is reconsidered and the controversial terms in the Bill removed, to prevent misinterpretations by vested interests elements.

Peace is a legacy we have inherited from our ancestors, and we believe that it is the solemn duty of every citizen to uphold and safeguard this legacy, regardless of community or religious groups. We seek your kind intervention in ensuring this not only in Assam but also in other states of the region.

We remain,

01. 1. John S. Shilshi

02. James Pochury

03. Michael L. Haokip

04. Renzo Biswa

05. David Boyes

06. Simon Rongmei

07. Jonah Ngachonmi

08. Irene Salam



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09. Luke Sangkima

10. Francis Vialo

11. Desmond Kharmawphlang

12. Elias Soren

13. Ngaoni James

14. John Borgoyary

15. Joseph M. Thohrii

16. Thingreingam Irenaeus

17. Felix Jajo

18. Tracy Shilshi

19. Catherine Rutsa

20. John Wungreithei

21. Pekhi Nabam

22. Vanlalmuana Darlong

23. Mungreiphy Shimray

24. Benjamin Chang



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25. David Tithong

27. Carroll Sangnghina

29. Vincent Darlong

31. D. Stephen K. Yanthan

33. Gailinlung Michael Pamei

35. Uttam Debbarma

37. David Sangma

26. Simon Thaikho

28. Obeyson Pao

30. Siile Anthony

32. Philip Lyngdoh

34. Robert Shimray

36. A.S. Chipem Francis

38. Seldin N. Sangma