

PETITION TO THE CHARITY COMMISSIONERS

We, the undersigned, wish to express our deep concern that British-based organizations involved in fundraising for groups proved to have orchestrated and carried out genocidal attacks in India are still enjoying charity status. We urge you to immediately withdraw the charity status of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), of Sewa International which fundraises using the HSS's charity registration number , and of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad(VHP)UK.

In February and March 2002 Gujarat state in India witnessed state sponsored attacks on the minority Muslim community in which at least 2,000 people - the majority women and children - were horrifically tortured and killed. Many thousands more have seen their families, homes and livelihoods destroyed.

Extensive evidence collected by independent human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as the British High Commission in India and the international media has confirmed that the massacres were planned and carried out by a network of Hindu supremacist organisations, the VHP, RSS and others, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar. These groups have subsequently stated their intention of repeating the Gujarat 'experiment' elsewhere in India.

In Britain branches of the same organisations are diverting funds collected in the name of welfare to this ongoing campaign of hatred and violence against minority communities in India. Some of these organisations including the HSS (charity no. 267309)- which is the international wing of the RSS and fundraises through Sewa International - and the VHP (UK)(charity no.262684), enjoy the status of registered charities. This is a major factor enabling them to raise funds on a large scale often from donors unaware of their activities in India.

A Channel 4 News report on December 12 exposed Sewa International (whose gross income rose from £748,355 in 2000 to £2,175,971 last year) and the HSS, the registered charity which set up Sewa International. The programme revealed how one organisation which received £92,000 from Sewa International, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram in Gujarat, is directly implicated in the February-March 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom. Forensic evidence implicates a leading member of the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, who is currently "on the run from the police," as "leading a mob of 2,000 tribal people" in an attack on Muslim minorities. The programme also reported that a Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram leader "threatened the villagers saying that if they didn't join in provoking the Muslims and burning them, they would also be treated like Muslims and burnt." And a local Hindu activist told of Kalyan Ashram's plans for yet more violence "The Christians have made a church in our village. We have thought several times of destroying it. One day we will definitely break it down."

The Channel 4 investigation is not the first time the links between British-based organisations - Sewa International, the HSS, and the VHP(UK) - and the Hindu supremacist outfits have been exposed. They were also drawn to your attention in September 2002 by Indian organisations in Britain.

While we are aware that you are undertaking an investigation into the activities and goals of the HSS and Sewa International, we are deeply concerned that so many months have passed and no action has yet been taken. Funds collected from unsuspecting British donors continue to be used to finance the ongoing violence. Children, women and men are still being killed in Gujarat and fresh pogroms are feared elsewhere in India. We urge you to act now

Leena Dhingra, Ahimsa

Sarbjit Johal, Asian Women Unite

Hanne Stinson, British Humanist Association

Campaign Against Racism and Fascism

Mohammed Zina, Council of Indian Muslims

Rosemary Morris, Friends of All-India Christian Council

Rita Rupal, Newham Asian Women's Group

Asad Rehman, Newham Monitoring Project

Pritam Singh, Oxford Gujarat Initiative

Mukhtar Rana, Peace and Human Rights Trust

Mukhtar Dar, South Asian Alliance Birmingham

Nirmala Rajasingham, South Asia Solidarity Group

Sherry Chopra, Southall Black Sisters

Women Living under Muslim Laws

March 3, 2003