

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development. I encourage Mr. CALLAHAN and my fellow Appropriations Committee colleagues to support language recently added to an accompanying Senate Appropriations bill that would ban all oil and natural gas exploration in the forest. Our House Energy and Water Development conferees have the ability to retain the Senate version's language when the spending package is considered in conference later this year.

My father, former Rep. William F. Walsh, represented this area in Congress in the 1970's. During that time, he fought hard to ensure this pristine wilderness area would be protected for future generations. In our current attempts to construct a sound and responsible national energy policy, it is my hope that this body recognizes the need for continued environmental stewardship to protect these national treasures for the generations that follow.

I urge my fellow members to support my call to ban drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest.

RECOGNIZING AN OUTSTANDING
FRIENDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN TWO CITIES,
IRWINDALE, CA, AND
SALVATIERRA, GUANAJUATO,
MEXICO

HON. HILDA L. SOLIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, August 1, 2001

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an international friendship that began many years, has withstood the test of time and continues to grow as each year passes.

The Sister City Partnership between the City of Irwindale, California, in the 31st Congressional District and the City of Salvatierra, Guanajuato, Mexico, began 36 years ago. Through this partnership, both communities have realized cultural and humanitarian benefits.

For example, the City of Salvatierra has received donations from Irwindale of much-needed equipment such as a fire engine, ambulance, street sweeper and optical instruments to improve the quality of life for its citizens.

In addition, Irwindale has experienced firsthand the benefits of cultural exchange and good will through the bi-annual visits of its residents to Mexico. In fact, a local park in Salvatierra, Mexico, was named after the City of Irwindale.

I am privileged to recognize these two exemplary cities, Irwindale and Salvatierra, for their friendship and exchanges that benefit residents in both cities.

CONGRATULATIONS TO COUNCIL
OF KHALISTAN

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, August 1, 2001

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, the Council of Khalistan, led by my friend Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, recently completed 15 years of service

and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Council of Khalistan. Dr. Aulakh is a well-known presence around here. He has been working these halls for 15 years, advocating the cause of freedom for the Sikhs of Punjab, Khalistan, who are being subjected to brutal tyranny by the Indian government.

The Sikhs and other minorities like the Christians, Muslims, Dalit "untouchables," and others have been killed by the tens of thousands, held as political prisoners in large numbers—over 52,000 Sikhs alone, according to a recent report from the Movement Against State Repression—and subjected to other atrocities like violent attacks on religious institutions like Christian churches and schools, the Golden Temple, and the Babri mosque, attempts to burn down a Gurdwara and some houses, the Staines murder. In the face of these atrocities democratic India does nothing.

It is because of the efforts of activists like Dr. Aulakh that these matters come to light. He is a major leader in the human-rights movement and the leader of the Sikh community. I salute him for his tireless efforts and submit the following articles.

CONCERN AT NEW THREATS TO RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

[The following statement was issued in New Delhi and Hyderabad on Sunday, 29th July 2000 by All India Christian Council President Dr Joseph D'Souza and Secretary General John Dayal in the wake of reports of draconian changes in the Foreign Contributions regulation act, the Private members Bill in the Lok Sabha against freedom of faith, the incidence of Vishwa Hindu Parishad goons "arresting" Christian workers in Varanasi, the forcible "re-conversion" of Orissa Christians under the combined pressure of the VHP and the Orissa Police.]

The All India Christian Council calls upon Civil Society, the national Human Rights Commission and fellow citizens to take united action to counter a series of recent incidents in several Indian states by Fundamentalist extremists of the Sangh Parivar, as well as by police forces acting at their behest, in which the civil rights of Christian individuals and groups have been violently attacked. The Council is deeply concerned that the central and state governments, instead of taking urgent steps to restore confidence among the terrorised minorities, have seemingly condoned such actions. The Centre is in fact, according to media reports, bringing forward legislation that will further and more seriously affect religious minorities in the country and their work, and injure Constitutional guarantees.

The Council has declared it will extend all legal assistance to the victims who have been terrorised, specially in the states of Orissa, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The most ominous incident has taken place in Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where the state government controlled by the Bharatiya Janata party has condoned military training with firearms provided to elements of the Sangh Parivar in recent months. In that city on 24th July 2001, a Christian religious worker was among five persons "detained" by self styled vigilantes of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The five men had come to the city to attend a meeting. The City Superintendent of Police, who had the five men released, admitted they were innocent of the charges of conversion levied against them. The police have however taken no action against the VHP goons who terrorised the Christian group.

VHP groups are also terrorising the inmates of an ashram in Kota district of

Rajasthan which is home to over 1,500 destitute and orphaned young people from various parts of the country. Death threats have been made against Bishop M A Thomas and officials of the Ashram. Many other similar cases have been reported from other states.

In Orissa, ruled by a coalition in which the BJP is a partner, the police have looked on while Tribal Christians are being coerced into "reconverting" to Hinduism. The Police have evoked the infamous and ironically named Freedom of Religion Act selectively against the Christians but not against their tormentors. As the media has reported, 17 adult persons had some time ago become Christians, and had told the police they had done so of their own free will, without any duress or allurement. The police, acting at the behest of local religio-political goons, however, chose to prosecute them and registered cases against them. Emboldened by this, the local fundamentalist elements intimidated the Christians, organising social ostracisation against them. Reports suggest that the authorities tacitly supported the "reconversion." The council has deplored the blatant religious partisanship of the local police and civil administration.

It is quite clear that these elements are getting strengthened by the attitude of the Central government. The minority communities, specially Christians are alarmed, at the failure of the Central government to denounce a Private Members bill moved by one of their party members in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, which seeks a ban on religious conversions, which in effect means a ban on freedom of faith. This bill evoked dark memories of a similar Hitlerian OP Tyagi Bill in the late Seventies which the government, of which the current Bharatiya Janata party was a part, had extended its support.

The council has also strongly criticised the government's reported plan to enact new laws to strangle foreign donations and grants to minority, specially Christian, institutions and organisations. The existing Foreign Contributions Act, FCRA, is already being used as a weapon by the BJP government to target Christian groups and to stifle all protest. We fear the proposed laws are being designed to entirely curtail the educational and public welfare work of the Christian church in India. Christian groups have been thoroughly investigated in the law two years and have been found innocent, and yet extremist groups as well as ruling political parties have persisted a hate campaign against us using disinformation, half truths and malicious lies.

We call upon Civil Society, the national Human Rights Commission and all fellow citizens to unite in fighting this erosion of civil liberties and constitutional guarantees.

HAVE YOU DONE ENOUGH???

The anti-Christian Bill is in the Parliament. This is a place where even very sensitive Bills have been passed by manipulations, ignorance and negligence. Pandemoniums are created to pass Bills by voice votes. Bills become Acts in a second as opposition stages a walkout.

Have you heard your representative opposing the Bill? Have you heard the Christian MP's forum responding? Have you read about the Bill in your newspaper? Have you heard any of the church leaders speaking out? Now the burden is upon you. Do you know that it is the Sikh leader Gurmit Singh Aulakh who dedicates all his energies to bring up the issue of Christian persecution before the American legislative bodies?

How many Indian Christians have you seen lobbying against the persecution of Christians at the UN organisations or the US Committees?