

12

Written Comments From Delegates

During the conference, facilities were provided for submitting written comments to the committee. As with the Discussion Panels (pp 34 and 66), the writers are only identified where an organisation is represented. The comments reflect the wide range of opinions that were expressed throughout the day, and inclusion here does not necessarily imply the Committee's endorsement of any view expressed.

Representing Action Aid, London: India alone, or a 'national approach' cannot solve the whole problem of 'communal violence', or maintain minority rights. A 'Regional Approach' is needed, but it must be in addition to a national approach and activities.

I would welcome such an approach and would actively support it.

A Church of England bishop: Is there a positive contribution those with faith in God can make to the healing of the nation?

A Delegate: What a wonderful conference. Keep it up! Brilliant work. Mr Chairperson, with regard to Points 5 & 6 of the Recommendations: the territorial integrity of India as it stands now cannot be compromised. All peace activities should be undertaken within that framework.

A Delegate: It is a fact of life that communalism exists on both sides. But dishonest, one-sided and biased expression, as at this conference, cannot help to heal the wounds.

A Delegate: The Indian Press and electronic media enjoy as much freedom as in any other democratic country. Let's not forget: it is because of the reports from Indian media that we can discuss Gujarat today.

Please don't forget the misery of the Indian Kashmir Pandits suffering at the Delhi Camp, also the result of minority cleansing - refugees in their own county. I am a Hindu but I do not subscribe to the VHP and RSS actions and thoughts. They have tarnished Hinduism's future and tradition. Narendra Modi should be removed from power.

One final point. Just as it is the majority's responsibility to maintain harmony, so it is the responsibility of the minority community to show and take some responsibility. The onus is on both sides.

A Delegate: A very useful conference. Congratulations.

The next conference ought really to cover all minorities in South Asia. We can then take the wind from the sails of those who accused this conference of 'Hindu-bashing'.

Representing Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London: The title, by mixing two different issues, amounts to denigrating India.

Because this event was (deliberately?) fixed for 15 August, it indirectly boycotts India's Independence Day celebrations at the Indian Embassy. This irritates many of us who had to miss one of the two important events.

Are we protesting here, pointing our fingers at the situation in India, or showing our sympathy and support? If we are protesting, the protest should be against the Muslim vandals who set the fire in the first place. If we are pointing fingers at the Indian situation, why do it now? There have been no protests before, never to this extent.

Are the Human Rights organisations watching the Islamic countries where other faiths always become secondary citizens?

Only a coward attacks the mild and fears the wild religions.

If our aim was to help, why didn't we talk about all the barbaric incidents that were started only by Muslims? Sir Gulam Noon admired the plurality implicit in the prophet Mohammed and the Koran. Fine. Why then, whenever a State becomes Muslim majority, is it converted to an Islamic State and other religions lose their rights?

Poor toilet conditions, red tape etc, as pointed out by Harsh Mander in Gujarat, are not just riot conditions. In India these things happen naturally. Boycotting Muslim shops irritates only those who do not know (as I do) that Muslims do the same thing when their number is overwhelming.

I wish the Indian Muslim leaders like Syed Shahabuddin and Shahi Imam Buquari would also declare, like Sir G. K. Noon, that 'I am first an Indian' and not 'I am first a Muslim and then an Indian' as they say again and again, separating the Muslims from the Indian mainstream. In fact, already minorities enjoy more rights than the majority, the Hindus.

EU MPs were welcomed and taken to only those areas in Gujarat riot where Muslims suffered much. Naturally, the reports are all biased.

Maja Daruwala described only VHP and RSS representatives as sectarians, fundamentalists. Why does she not tell us about the Muslim League which divided India and is now active in secular India in spreading communal poison? What was the intention of today's speakers, who said repeatedly that the Gujarat riots will happen again?

Maja Daruwala said 'we minorities are standing here helpless!' which is not adequate. Maja spoke of the insecurity of a particular community, when we say the condition has returned to normality. But we Hindus always feared to walk alone in Muslim-dominated

areas, in many parts of India. That is nothing to do with riots. It is mutual suspicion.

One speaker spoke about the strong bureaucracy in the government machinery. But how many people in UK know that the behaviour of Muslim police officers is communally motivated whenever there are riots? In fact the Indian Constitution, as well as the corrupt politicians and the bureaucrats, make the minorities feel encouraged and unabated.

Many of those here do not know the real India, that's all!

This delegate also submitted a copy of the Conference Recommendations, revised to incorporate the points made above.