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INDIA | Six Wounded in Prayer Meeting Attack

Six Christians were seriously injured in a planned ambush by Hindu militants on a prayer meeting in a private home in Uttar Pradesh, India, on Feb. 7. The prayer meeting was held at the home of church leader Pastor Ranjit and was attended by about 40 Christians in Chapar village, Sultanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest province.

The meeting was interrupted by 25 Hindu militants, who subjected the Christians to verbal abuse and physical assault, resulting in six people requiring urgent medical attention. Bibles and other church property were also damaged in the onslaught.

Efforts are being made by a local monitoring group to assist the victims in registering a First Information Report (FIR) which the police require in order to open an investigation. The police have demanded medical assessments of those injured before registering FIRs. A source close to CSW reported that the perpetrators had threatened to kill the Christians if they continued to gather for prayer meetings. A similar incident occurred in Chapar village in November 2018.

John Dayal, a civil rights activist and writer in India, said, "Uttar Pradesh seems to have thrown away both democracy and the Indian constitution in the state sponsored or condoned violence against religious minorities. The state has seen one hundred or more cases of violence against Christians at prayer meetings or in churches and institutions. Portents and remonstrations with the chief minister over the past twelve months have failed to end the impunity. Police are either complicit or unconcerned. We fear a worsening of the situation in the next two months leading to the general elections."

Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a rise in targeted attacks against Christians in the past 24 months as a result of the false narrative about Christians forcefully converting people, which has been created by groups aligned to the Hindutva campaign of intolerance. Local sources report that the District of Janupur experienced 12 incidents of violence in September 2018, with many Christians being turned away from churches and instances of Christian homes being raided in the night and their occupants being taken for interrogation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply concerned by this attack on a peaceful gathering of Christians, the latest indicator of a wider problem of intolerance in Uttar Pradesh. We call on the police in Uttar Pradesh to conduct a thorough investigation into the attack and ensure that all perpetrators are brought to justice. We are increasingly concerned about the atmosphere of intolerance and hate towards religious minorities, which is unfolding in Uttar Pradesh and across India. The Christian minority in India is experiencing an uncertain and frightening future in which their fundamental rights to worship, observe, practice and teach their religion or belief are under threat. We urge India to uphold the rule of law by respecting the fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including those who belong to minority religions."