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INDIA | Families Denied Basic Services

Five families belonging to the Believers Eastern Church in Bahardi, Latehar District, Jharkhand state, face being cut off from basic amenities and having their land confiscated if they do not become Hindus.

Local sources report that the Christians have come under pressure from Hindu fundamentalists led by a local person called Baleswer Oraon. On April 10, after an endorsement by the head of the village, approximately 30 families held a “gram panchayat” (village council) meeting where a resolution was passed declaring that the Christian families are no longer allowed to draw water from the village water-pump, which is a government facility. The families were also informed that their agricultural land was confiscated and that government food ration was stopped.

This was not the first time the five families have come under pressure from the local villagers to convert. On Nov. 16, 2017, building materials belonging to Madwari Oraon, one of the Christians affected, were destroyed in a case of suspected arson. Madwari Oraon purchased wood under a government scheme to build the roof of his home.

Local sources informed CSW that the attack was a deliberate attempt to prevent him from completing the construction of his home because he is a Christian. When an attempt was made to register a police complaint against the perpetrators, the police forced all five families to go through a Hindu conversion ritual presided over by a Hindu priest at the police station. During the ritual they were forced to drink holy water, and holy ash was applied on their foreheads.

Motilal Oraon, a member of one of the families affected, told CSW, “The Christian community in the village and surrounding area are now living in terror that anything could happen to them. Our lives are in the hands of people who want to see us destroyed if we do not give in to their wishes. The local administrative offices and law enforcements agencies are not paying any attention to our plight. We are no longer sure how future is going to look like. Our children’s education and social growth [sic] are in total uncertainty.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is highly concerning to see these religious minority families being harassed because of their faith. It is their fundamental

right to experience the religion of their choice freely. We call on the authorities to take the necessary steps to safeguard the fundamental rights of these families and to ensure that the perpetrators of intolerance and hate are brought to justice. The authorities must also restore the Christians' land and access to basic services.”