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## INDIA | Christians Assaulted While Distributing Tracts

Two Christian men were assaulted and driven away from outside the grounds of Murugaram theatre on May 31 in Ravana Nagar, Karaikal, Puducherry. The two men identified as R. Gunasekaran, 32, and K. Kumaravel, 33, were distributing Christian tracts in Karaikal for 10 days prior to the incident.

Local sources say the perpetrator of the attack, known by his twitter handle as “BJP Appu Manikandan,” is the president of the youth wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Karaikal. The attacker was assisted by an accomplice who video recorded the incident, which was uploaded on Twitter.

The video shows Gunasekaran and Kumaravel being confronted, assaulted and driven away, and the tracts being flung to the ground. It appears the men continued to be assaulted even after retreating from their attacker. A police complaint against the perpetrators was filed, but at the time of writing, the police are yet to register a First Information Report (FIR).

Findings from local monitoring groups state that Tamil Nadu witnessed the second highest number of reported cases of violence against religious minorities between January and April 2019 after Uttar Pradesh.

Nehemiah Christie, Director of Legislation & Regulations of the Synod of Pentecostal Churches in Tamil Nadu, said, “I am upset to see the BJP-RSS functionaries becoming militant in their approach towards religious minorities in Tamil Nadu. Any expression of minority faith in the public space is now at risk of resistance and violence from Hindu fundamentalists. It does not help that people like Manikandan are inspired when their leaders are culpable of perpetrating a culture of intolerance and hate. Whether you are a Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Buddhist, everyone has an equal right to share and practice their faith. It is our constitutional right and no one has the right to hit another for sharing his or her faith.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We are deeply concerned at the rise in the intimidation and harassment of Christians who are simply exercising their fundamental right to share their faith. We urge the authorities to hold the perpetrators of

attacks like this to account, and to ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief is protected for all.”