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INDIA | Couple Threatened for Distributing Tracts

On Sept. 15, two Indian Christians, Leo Johnson and his wife Jenifa, were intimidated and threatened in the residential area of Bombay Castle, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu state.

The couple had spent the day in the area distributing Christian tracts to homes. As they were making their way back home, they were stopped and questioned by a man believed to be affiliated with the far-right Hindu nationalist group, Hindu Munani. The man called two other friends, and they started harassing the couple, accusing them of compelling people in the neighborhood to convert.

Mr. Johnson told CSW, "We did not speak to people about Jesus. All my wife and I did was to distribute the tracts to homes. No one was forced to take the literature." Mr. Johnson said that despite explaining what they were doing, the three men threatened him and his wife by raising their fists and using abusive language. They warned the couple never to share tracts in the area and that if they were seen again, they would be attacked violently.

The men then demanded the couple apply holy ash on their foreheads, which they collected from a local Hindu temple. Mr. Johnson was forced to put some on his wife's forehead. He said, "Jenifa was terrified by the incident and started crying. I did not know what to do and to avert further harassment, I submitted to their demands. This should not have happened to us as India is supposed to be a free country where we can practice our faith. Even though it was a humiliating moment for us as it all happened in a public area and people were watching the events unfold, we will continue to share our faith."

A complaint has been made to the local District Collector and the police have assured the couple that a First Information Report (FIR) will be registered.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are disturbed by this report of the threats and intimidation that Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were subjected to, simply for sharing their faith. This should never happen in a country like India where the constitution allows people to freely practice their faith, which includes the right to share that faith with others. CSW urges the authorities to put an end to the culture of impunity that surrounds the threatening behavior meted out by extremists such as these men, who do not

respect the constitutional right to freedom of religion or belief of their fellow citizens, and for the police to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the threats made to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson.”