



Coalition Against Genocide

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AMERICAN EXPRESS OFFICIALLY WITHDRAWS SPONSORSHIP OF AAHOA CONVENTION: ANOTHER VICTORY FOR THE COALITION AGAINST GENOCIDE

An American Express spokesperson today cleared all confusion and announced it was withdrawing sponsorship of the Asian American Hotel Owner Association of America (AAHOA) convention that sought to honor Mr. Narendra Modi, the Indian politician who has been internationally condemned for his human rights abuses and for direct responsibility in the 2002 pogrom against minorities in Gujarat, India.

Writing to the Coalition Against Genocide, American Express representative Ms. Elliott stated, "A conference that was intended to help promote travel and tourism has become the object of partisan political contention. Therefore, we have chosen to withdraw from the conference."

CAG considers the American Express withdrawal a magnificent victory for human rights of the victims of the Gujarat genocide, and commends the corporation for refusing to be associated with the violent oppression of minority communities in India. The withdrawal followed a concerted campaign by CAG, protesting American Express' sponsorship of the convention. Mr. Modi, the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, had been invited by AAHOA as a guest of honor at its convention and trade fair to be held in Ft. Lauderdale, FL on March 24 – 26 2005. He had been indicted by various Indian and International human rights organizations for his role in the pogroms directed at the Muslim community in Gujarat in 2002. AAHOA treasurer Danny Patel had earlier claimed that the sponsorship was still active, but American Express officially confirmed today that it has been withdrawn.

This positive development is the latest in a series of victories such as the US State department's decision to deny Mr. Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat and the chief architect of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, a diplomatic visa and to revoke his existing tourist/business visa based on the International Religious Freedom Act. Earlier in the campaign, Mr. Chris Matthews, host of Hardball on MSNBC, who was a keynote speaker at the convention along with Mr. Modi, had withdrawn after CAG wrote to him. By withdrawing its sponsorship of the convention, American Express has set a good example for responsible corporate behavior.

The Modi government has continually been threatening and victimizing Christians, Muslims, Dalits (lower caste people), Adivasis (tribals) and secular Hindus who have raised their voice in search of justice for the victims of the Gujarat pogrom, even as it prevented victims from gaining legal and social justice. The continuous efforts of thousands of secular activists in India and abroad, attempting to bring the perpetrators to trial in courts of law, had resulted in exposing Narendra Modi's role in the violence and his undying faith in the sectarian and



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violent ideology of Hindutva. His visit to the United States has been seen as an attempt to rehabilitate his severely tarnished image. A number of the reports from human rights organizations and a special dossier on Mr. Modi are available on the coalition website (<http://www.coalitionagainstgenocide.org/reports.php>).

AAHOA had scheduled its annual convention from March 24-26 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and American Express was a founding sponsor of the convention. CAG had written a letter to AAHOA leadership on Feb 19th, 2005 expressing dismay that they had chosen to honor Narendra Modi and asking them to rescind the invitation. However, AAHOA's leadership categorically refused to do so. In a letter dated March 4th, 2005, CAG wrote to American Express that the corporation's sponsorship of the event would legitimize a politician who can be held accountable for the Gujarat pogrom under the guidelines of the international convention on genocide. This letter was followed by numerous calls, emails and faxes from human rights activists, professors, students and other concerned community members to several American Express Executives.

Commending American Express' belated decision, CAG member Dr. Usha Zacharias observed: "The campaign against Narendra Modi is not one of partisan politics, but a campaign for justice. At a time when corporations have become famous for the worst kind of callous cynicism, American Express' ethical action is a model to be followed."

CAG is appalled that despite protests from numerous human rights activists and concerned individuals (including several members of AAHOA), the AAHOA leadership has refused to cancel its invitation to Mr. Modi and is attempting to videocast his talk. CAG urges the AAHOA leadership to rescind their invitation immediately and work towards safeguarding the pluralist ethos of India and the economic well being of the Indian Diaspora in the U.S.

NOTE: CAG is a U.S. and Canada-based coalition of over three dozen organizations (and ten supporting groups) including grassroots organizations, women's groups, human rights advocacy groups, and community based NGOs. Our members come from diverse religious, ethnic and political backgrounds. We are bound together by our desire to see that justice is ensured to the victims of the Gujarat massacres, and by our desire to ensure that such violence is never replicated elsewhere. To this end, we are determined to stop Narendra Modi from gaining legitimacy in the United States from corporate sponsors and hosts who may be unaware of the politics he represents.