



Coalition Against Genocide

March 16, 2005

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Dear President Maxson, Professor Tsuchida, and Professor Kaminsky,

We at the Coalition Against Genocide, representing a wide spectrum of over 35 organizations, are writing to urge you to revoke your decision to invite Gujarat Chief Minister Mr. Narendra Modi to inaugurate the Yadunandan Center for India Studies at the Asian and Asian American Studies Department of California State University, Long Beach on March 22, 2005.

In Gujarat, between February 28-March 02, 2002, under Narendra Modi's leadership, more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed, aided and abetted by the state. In the aftermath, 200,000 people have been rendered homeless and internally displaced. Today, three years after the event, the victims of the violence still await justice and reparations. Mr. Modi not only failed to take preventative measures against those who were planning the violence with his knowledge, but undertook a series of actions which either tacitly or explicitly condoned the brutal violence, which included torture of children and mass rapes of women.

Numerous inquiries and commissions, including the Indian National Human Rights Commission, have condemned the role of the Government of Gujarat, headed by Mr. Modi, in providing leadership and material support in the politically motivated attacks on minorities in Gujarat in 2002. The European Union, and every major Indian and international human rights organization including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Commonwealth Initiative for Human Rights, Citizen's Initiative, People's Union for Civil Liberties, and the People's Union for Democratic Rights, have condemned the Gujarat genocide, and pointed to the complicity of the Government of Gujarat in the violence. A report from India's Justice U.C. Banerjee Commission has concluded that the fire in coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express, which resulted in the deaths of 59 people, was an accident and not a terrorist attack on Hindu pilgrims as was claimed by those who organized and condoned the violence.



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Mr. Modi is in violation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, among other international laws. The Government of Gujarat under Modi continues to harass and discriminate against its Christian and Muslim minority populations, as well as other marginalized groups with new policies and skewed application of existing laws. Under Mr. Modi's leadership, more than 2,000 of 4,000 cases filed by the victims of the violence were never investigated or dismissed, leading the Supreme Court of India to rebuke both the Gujarat judiciary and the Government of Gujarat for its handling of the cases, and transferring several cases out of the state for trial. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the United States Department of State released a report on International Religious Freedom in 2002, pointing to the culpability of the Government of Gujarat in the violence, its violations of human rights and religious freedoms, and the targeting of other minority groups, such as Christians, following the event. As you know, there has also been bi-partisan support in the United States for human rights in Gujarat. Former President Clinton condemned the events in Gujarat, and Congressman Joseph Pitts (R-PA) addressed the United States House of Representatives on June 18, 2002, condemning the premeditated brutality in Gujarat and acknowledging insufficient action on the part of the United States. Congressman Pitts also conveyed that Hindu extremist groups receive some of their funds from charities in the United States and the United Kingdom. Research undertaken by two independent groups, the Campaign To Stop Funding Hate and South Asia Watch Ltd, have demonstrated as well that Hindu nationalist organizations supporting Mr. Modi in Gujarat have corresponding organizations in the United States that undertake fundraising to sustain the work of Hindu fundamentalism in India. Mr. Modi is expected to visit the United States on such a fundraising trip now.

By inviting such a person to inaugurate an India Studies Center, the California State University, Long Beach is endorsing Mr. Narendra Modi's actions and is suggesting he is a model to be emulated. The university is not only dishonouring the victims of the Gujarat genocide, but our common humanity. Your decision is not only morally incomprehensible but academically unwise. Mr. Modi is also a volunteer or pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS has been responsible since its inception in 1925 for propagating a politics of hate and violence against non-Hindu minorities and for its agenda of racist Hindu supremacism. M.S. Golwalkar, one of the ideologues of the RSS, explicitly endorsed Hitler's campaign against the Jews in Germany, calling it a form of "race pride" India should emulate. An RSS member assassinated M. K. Gandhi on January 30, 1948, and the organization has been banned in India more than once for its incendiary activity.

The line between hate speech and free speech can be blurred, and courts in the United States have often struggled to define this line. We wish to make it clear that we are not against free speech: one can imagine contexts where it might be productive to see RSS representatives debate its views. However, by inviting an elected official and RSS member who has been indicted for genocide and crimes against humanity in India to inaugurate the program in India Studies at California State University, Long Beach you are unwittingly helping to sanitize Mr. Modi's image, even as you are compromising the academic integrity of the new Program in India Studies. Narendra Modi has utilized his position of leadership to endorse state complicity in genocide against minority religious communities and socially disenfranchised groups. Mr. Modi has utilized his position as Chief Minister to foment hatred, mobilize violence, organize police, and intimidate the press. He has enacted and violations of, and disregard for, human rights. He hardly represents the kind of image a university should project to its students, faculty and larger campus community.



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On March 15, 2005, Resolution 156 was introduced in the United States Congress by Congressperson John Conyers, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee and the Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressperson Joseph Pitts, a member of the India Caucus and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, "condemning the conduct of Chief Minister Narendra Modi for his actions to incite religious persecution and urging the United States to condemn all violations of religious freedom in India." The ramifications of offering an RSS pracharak an open invitation to a university in the United States will be seen as putting a stamp of approval on its political campaigns. The Asian and Asian American Studies Department at California State University, Long Beach's invitation to Narendra Modi will tarnish the good name and reputable image of your institution. We strongly urge California State University, Long Beach to rescind Mr. Modi's invitation to inaugurate the India Studies Center, and to issue a public statement to this effect.

Enclosed please find a dossier that documents the massacre in Gujarat. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like further information.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. George Abraham, Non Resident Indians for a Secular and Harmonious India
Dr. Angana Chatterji, Professor of Anthropology, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco
Ms. Sapna Gupta, South Asian Progressive Action Collective
Dr. Ashwini Rao, Campaign to Stop Funding Hate
Dr. Shaik Ubaid, Indian Muslim Council
Dr. Usha Zacharias, Professor of Communications, Westfield State College, Massachusetts