

## Indian ad against missionaries irks Christians, civil leaders

Indian ad against missionaries irks Christians, civil leaders Cites Mahatma Gandhi stating that illiterate tribal and Dalit people can not differentiate between Jesus and Mohammed Indian ad against missionaries irks Christians, civil leaders



Jharkhand state in eastern India has produced an advertisement against Christian missionaries, drawing protests from Christian leaders and civil society members who see it as part of a vicious ongoing campaign.

That this was being done officially by a state government was shameful, said Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, secretary-general of the Indian bishops' conference.

The advertisement, appearing in local Hindi media on Aug. 12, misquoted independence hero and father of the Indian nation Mahatma Gandhi. It carried a picture of him smiling and saying that Christian missionaries frequently sought to convert poor people by offering benefits.

It cited Gandhi as stating that illiterate tribal and Dalit people could not differentiate between Jesus and the Prophet Mohammed because they were as mute and simple as cows.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which rules in Jharkhand state and nationally, as well as some other

Hindu groups, maintain that Christian educational and health services are used as a cover for religious motives.

The controversial advertisement appeared on the same day the state legislature passed a law banning allurements or forced religious conversion.

Bishop Mascarenhas, who is also the auxiliary bishop of Ranchi, the archdiocese based in the Jharkhand state capital, told ucanews.com that the ad brought political and social discourse to a low level and in effect suggested that people in the state were too simple to make decisions for themselves about their religious beliefs.

Critics say the anti-conversion law and advertisement are part of a campaign against religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims since 2014 when the BJP government came to power in New Delhi, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We would like to know what the prime minister, who repeats 'sabka saath sabka vikaas' (with all, for the growth of all) as his slogan thinks of this blatant misuse of power by a chief minister," the bishop said.

A section of the media also accused the state of misusing funds in the campaign and misquoting Gandhi.

Jharkhand Solidarity Forum, a collective of religious and civil society organizations, said the state government was deliberately disrupting religious harmony.

"Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, believed in all religions and was strictly against dividing people on the basis of religion," the forum said.

The state's almost five percent Christian population is well above the national average of 2.3 percent.

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