



Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc. (World Hindu Council of America)

President's address: 37 Kimberly Rd, West Hartford, CT 06107 jparekh@attbi.com
National Office: P.O. Box 441505, Houston, TX 77244, 281-496-5676 www.vhpa.org

June 17, 2002

TO:

Ms. Felice D. Gaer
Commissioner, United States Commission
On International Religious Freedom
800 North Capitol Street, NW Suite 790
Washington DC 20002

Let me reiterate our strong condemnation for the killings of the 58 Hindu pilgrims on the Sabarmati Express by Muslims in Godhara, and the despicable violence in its aftermath. (See Exhibit-A, a letter from VHP of America president to its membership dated April 21, 2002).

The review of the material of the hearing on "Religious Violence in Gujarat, India" held by your commission on June 10th 2002 revealed that during the hearing, doubts were raised that millions of dollars raised by religious groups in USA were used to promote religious bigotry in Gujarat. Also the name of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (World Hindu Council of America) has been mentioned time and again. It becomes incumbent on my part to bring out the facts, which will dispel the doubts about VHP of America.

VHP of America is a tax-exempt, charitable organization, established in 1970 and operating under the IRS code 501 C (3). Our financial statements are audited by independent certified public accountants. VHP of America has a family focus. We believe that a well-knit family unit is a foundation for a harmonious society. Our programs therefore cater to the needs of children, youths and adults, instilling in them high moral values. We enrich the diverse American culture with time tested eternal Hindu values to make our youths better citizens of USA. (see Exhibit-B - Vision, Mission, Achievements and Programs)

It appears that there has been a misinformation campaign carried out against VHP of America and other Hindu organizations. The news media reports imply that VHP of America has been sending millions of dollars annually to VHP-India. As the enclosed financial summary shows, **our total annual revenue for last five years has ranged from 1/2 million dollars to 1.2 million dollars.** And our annual contribution to charitable causes in India and USA has been in the range of \$116,000 to \$575,000. (see Exhibit-C- Financial summary). VHP of America has been involved in providing help to non-VHP charitable organizations in India and USA since 1978. (see Exhibit-D -partial list of recipient charitable organization).

During some big natural calamity like the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, the incoming donation for a given project increases. Last year for the earthquake relief, the funds collected and sent were approx. \$430,000. (accounts for the year 2001 are still being compiled). VHP of America adopted the town of LODAI, located 32 Km from Bhuj, where 250 houses, school, medical center, community hall, town hall office building, water tank and roads are constructed. I, along with senior members of the organization, have personally visited the town in last January to check the progress of the rehabilitation, and we were satisfied with the progress. The rehabilitation project is scheduled to be completed by August 2002. (See exhibit-E Rehabilitation of town of LODAI).

The support-a-child program takes care of lodging, boarding and educational expenses of

the needy children in various states of India. Starting with 37 children in 1985, the number of children has increased to 786 in 2001. Many of our members have visited the schools and met the children who are supported by VHP of America. We receive annual progress reports from the institutions. (See Exhibit-D, Children supported in various states of India under Support-i).

As the figures indicate, the charitable organizations did not receive millions of dollars yearly from VHP of America. Even for the meager small funds that are sent to the charitable organizations, we have been assured and have confirmed independently that the funds are utilized for their intended purposes. The doubts are based on rumors rather than facts. We know that your august commission is set out to find the facts. Some of our representatives will be more than happy to testify to your commission and provide further information.

At this juncture let me bring out another concern. Based on the media as well as NHRC reports, it was expected that the allegations against VHP of America and affiliate organizations would be made. Yet the commission did not feel it appropriate to extend the invitation to any members of those organizations in the hearing. In fact the announcement for the hearing was publicly made on the 6th of June, only four days before the actual hearing, and those four days included a weekend. That did not allow sufficient time for the implicated groups to react and request proper representation. Some Hindu groups are alleging that the witnesses and guests, especially of the Indian origin, represented only one side. In the interest of fairness, we urge the fact-finding commission to allow the other side to represent their views equally.

VHP of America and other affiliate organizations have worked quietly over the years. They have not paid great attention on publicity. On the contrary it is evident that the other groups have engaged in twisting the facts. I urge your noble commission to separate facts from the exaggeration and misinformation based propaganda by the vested interests.

The killing of Muslims as well as Hindus is despicable. However let me illustrate my point of exaggeration with couple of examples. First, in the fall of 2001, genocide was committed in Bangladesh against Hindus. Reportedly over 500,000 Hindus were forced out of the country. They are still living as refugees in India. Thousands of Hindu women were raped, many in public streets. The media or the human rights agencies all over the world expressed no great concerns. Second, over 60,000 innocent Hindus have been killed in Kashmir and over 400,000 had been displaced from their own homes. After many years they have still been living as refugees. Once again the media and the world agencies have been silent on the issue. Kashmir genocide has been and continues to be much bigger scale genocide than Gujarat violence. And yet the media and the vested interests have been painting the Gujarat violence as bigger than the biggest holocaust the human race has ever witnessed. Please let me once again reiterate my sympathy to all the victims of the Gujarat violence - Muslim and Hindu. But I urge your commission, media and everyone to evaluate the situation in the right perspective. Separate the exaggeration from the reality, propaganda and misinformation from the facts. If we all resort to fairness, there is a greater possibility of attaining peace, harmony and brotherhood in the world.

I thank you for your time for reviewing the enclosed facts about and views from VHP of America. Looking forward to hearing from you,
Thanking you,

Jyotish Parekh
President, VHP America
(World Hindu Council of America)