

## **VIVAT International India PARTICIPATES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHTS OF DALIT CHRISTIANS IN INDIA**

Christians in India have been demanding through various means, including taking recourse to law, to strike down the Presidential Order of 1950 which denies equal rights to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin. In 1950 the Indian government established a quota system in education and government jobs as a type



of affirmative action for Hindu Dalits. Though these statutory privileges were later extended to Sikh dalits in 1956 and Buddhist dalits in 1990, the repeated requests of the Christian dalits who account for two-thirds of 27 million Christians in India, have gone unanswered. The Muslims and Christians have been continuously denied the Dalit status, which is totally unconstitutional as it denies equal rights to Christian and Muslim communities purely because of their religions.

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013 more than 3000 Dalit Christians and Muslims from all over the country staged a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi the capital of India demanding speedy implementation of the recommendations of Ranganath Misra Commission granting Scheduled Caste status to them. The demonstration was organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the National Council of Churches in India and the National Council of Dalit Christians.



Members of VIVAT International India participated in the protest rally showing our solidarity with the struggles of Dalit Christians in this country to attain their constitutional rights. VIVAT International India since its inception has taken up 'Constitutional Rights of Dalit Christians' as one of the major issues for advocacy and networking. Through our efforts

of networking with different dioceses we were able to mobilize priests, nuns and lay people to participate in this struggle.



The protest began at 10.00am with the meeting at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi wherein many eminent personalities and leaders including Bishops, Priests, Nuns, representatives from various Christian denominations, Muslim dalit groups, political parties etc. spoke on the issue of constitutional rights of Dalit Christians. The protest rally began at 12 noon with people marching towards the parliament holding placards and shouting slogans. Hundreds of the protesters from across India broke through police barricades and marched to Parliament

shouting "We want justice." But on the way the crowd was detained and police with baton began to beat up several protesters. Many people were badly injured and some were admitted in the hospital later on. Undeterred, the protesters, including Catholic priests in cassocks, knelt on the road with crosses in hand while a police truck mounted with water cannons sprayed them with muddy water several times. Later on the protesters were arrested, around 400 of them, and taken to the Police station at Parliament Street at 2.00pm.



At the police station the crowd continued to stage protest along with Bishops, Priests and Nuns. The organizers of the protest decided not to leave the place until Prime Minister gives an appointment to meet them and hear their demands. At 5.15pm in the evening Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh agreed to meet the leaders at 11.00am on the following day 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013. People dispersed after having spent more than three and half hours in the police station without lunch.



On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013 at 11.00am Mr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India met the ten member delegation led by Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto and heard the demands of Dalit Christians and accepted the memorandum. Prime Minister apologized to church leaders for the police beating the protesters including priests and nuns during the rally and assured that he would present the issue of Dalit Christians in the Cabinet to get their consent.

Members of VIVAT International India in solidarity with Dalit Christians in India continue to support their struggles until they attain their Constitutional Rights.

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