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To:

National Human Rights Commission
Sardar Patel Bhavan
Sansad Marg
New Delhi 110 001
Fax: 011 91 11 334 0016
Email: covdnhrc@nic.in

Re: GUJARAT GOVERNMENT'S BEHAVIOR DURING COMMUNAL RIOTS

We, the undersigned, strongly condemn the recent spate of violence in Gujarat and the Gujarat government's shameful behavior during these riots. Having lost confidence in the capacity of the Gujarat government to deal with the current crisis, we call upon the National Human Rights Commission to safeguard human rights and ensure justice for all residents of Gujarat.

The horrendous massacre of the passengers of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra is a reprehensible act and should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. It should be dealt with under the purview of the Indian constitutional law, which has provisions for dealing with such matters of gross criminality.

Instead of apprehending and bringing to trial the perpetrators of this criminal act, the Gujarat state machinery has decided to punish an entire community by letting loose reign of terror on the minority community. It has been deliberately feeble in its response to the marauding, organized gangs of rioters, and in some cases has actively encouraged this violence by stating that it is understandable and justified (*Soldiers 'held back to allow Hindus revenge,'* The Telegraph, London, March 4, 2002). We strongly condemn the Gujarat State Government for failing to act responsibly on this issue, which has resulted in the loss of more than 500 innocent lives.

We also condemn strongly the delay on the part of the Central and the State government in calling for Army deployments in the riot-affected areas, days after it had been abundantly clear to the national and international community that the state police was ineffectual in containing the violence. (*Where Had All the Soldiers Gone?* The Telegraph, Calcutta, India, March 2, 2002)

We strongly condemn the role of the various religious factions in escalating the violence in Gujarat, for vitiating the communal milieu in the entire nation and creating the polarized atmosphere where such large scale riots are possible. We note with disapproval that several of these groups have close connections to the State Government. (*VHP, BJP workers named in FIR on riots,* The Times of India, March 3, 2002)

OUR DEMANDS:

*** We call for the immediate setting up of an independent and impartial judicial enquiry into the cause of these riots and the government's inability to maintain law and order.** We further demand that the commission's findings be publicly disclosed as soon as possible and its suggestions be made binding upon the state government.

*** We call for immediate assistance, both material and psychological, to people affected by the riots.** We are shocked and dismayed that the state has so far done little to provide relief or succor to those who have lost family members, homes or businesses in the recent riots, or have been forced to move out of their homes because of security concerns. We demand that the state immediately rush medical and food aid to those who have been affected, besides making arrangements to shelter those displaced. We also urge the government to extend monetary assistance for rebuilding homes and businesses of those who have been affected by the riots. The government should take up the rebuilding of the riot-affected communities and businesses as its top priority.

* **We demand that the equal compensation be given to all victims.** All lives are equally precious, and giving smaller amounts of compensation to people of one community over another ([Debate rages over bias in victims' compensation](#), The Times of India, March 6, 2002) makes a mockery of the principles upon which India was founded. We demand that the amount of money accorded to the families of the dead in the riots should be equal to that granted for the victims of the Sabarmati Express fire, and this compensation should be disbursed immediately, impartially, and with complete transparency.

* **We call upon the Gujarat State Government to immediately issue a strong condemnation of those responsible for the violence in the state,** including those belonging to the cadres of the leading political party and its allies.

* **We call for the immediate dismissal of the police commissioners in the cities worst affected by violence,** including Mr. P.C. Pande (Ahmedabad) and Mr. Upendra Singh (Rajkot) who displayed remarkable inefficiency in maintaining law and order, and under whose 'leadership', the police forces turned a blind eye to the rampaging mobs creating havoc in these cities, and carrying out systematic massacres. Mr Pande has gone on record justifying the police inaction as that reflecting the sentiments of the larger community ([Avenge Hindu Mobs Attack Muslims in India](#), Washington Post, Mar 1, 2002). Mr. Singh is reported to have turned off his state-issued mobile phone as soon as rioting started in Rajkot ([Police chief vanishes as Rajkot burns](#), Times Of India, March 1, 2002).

* **We call for the resignation of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi** , who has shown himself to not just be completely incapable of leading the state in the time of crisis, but actively contributing to a worsening of the crisis by making insensitive statements suggesting that the victims brought the violence on themselves, and that the violence was a result of direct provocation. We, the citizens of a free world, find it particularly insulting that the chief minister should excuse his administration's failure to contain violence by stating the Newton's third law of motion, "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction" ([Newton Modi has a lot to answer](#), Times of India, March2, 2002). It is no surprise, therefore, that Mr. Modi's constituency, Rajkot, which did not witness any violence even in the wake of the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid, has now seen some of the worst carnage.

* **We demand that the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) not be applied in the state.** We share the concerns of citizens of Gujarat about the inability of the current government to assure civic rights to all its citizens. In this light, we ask that POTO not be applied in the state as it allows the government to operate under a cloak of secrecy. We request that all state actions be taken in a transparent and public manner in order to assure the citizens of Gujarat of the sincerity of the government in combating communal violence, and ensuring public confidence in the state machinery.

* **We demand an immediate end to all measures to curb the freedom of press.** If India is to remain a vibrant democracy, it is extremely important that the media be allowed to operate freely. We urge the government to remove all restrictions on the screening of different television channels in Gujarat, and to provide full access and security to media-persons covering the current situation throughout the state.

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CC:

Shri K.R. Narayanan
President of India
Rashtrapati Bhawan
New Delhi 110 004
Fax: 011 91 11 3017290

Shri A.B. Vajpayee
Prime Minister of India
152, South Block
New Delhi 110 001
Fax: 011 91 11 3016857

Email: <http://pmindia.nic.in/writetous.htm>

Shri S. S. Bhandari
Governor of Gujarat
Raj Bhavan
Sector 20
Gandhinagar 382-020
Gujarat
Fax: 011 91 2712 20068

Shri Narendra Modi
Chief Minister of Gujarat
Block No.1, 5th Floor,
New Sachivalaya,
Gandhinagar-382 010
Gujarat
Phone : 011 91 79 3232611 to 3232622
Fax : 011 91 79 3222020, 3222101
E-mail : mail@gujaratindia.com

Indian Embassies and Consulates