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"Recent Communal Violence in Gujarat, India, and the U.S. Response": Nishrin Hussain Testimony

JUNE 10, 2002

Many of you are aware of the treatment of innocent Muslims in India over the past few years and of the recent horrors in Gujarat in particular. In the aftermath of Godhra, Hindu radicals in Gujarat, organized gangs of hoodlums who systematically engaged in rape, pillage, and murder of thousands of Muslim men, women, and children, for the sole reason that they were Muslims!! They were systematically brutalized, killed and burnt alive.

Scores of women and children were gang raped in front of their parents and other relatives, mutilated with swords and knives, and finally doused with gasoline and burnt alive. Muslim homes, properties and businesses have been burnt and destroyed.

Man's inhumanity towards man has always defied understanding, and certainly Hindu-Muslim riots have been a recurring plague of the Indian sub-continent since 1947. What sets the recent events apart from the others is that they are now being done with the political support of the state and the active collaboration of the police.

My father, Ahsan Jafri, was 74 years old when he was killed and burnt in his home along with nearly 150 other Muslims, mostly women and children who had come to his home seeking protection from the violent mob. My father was a former Member of Parliament and had served India and its people for 50 years with distinction. His service to India was without regard to the politics of race, language, or religion. He was an enthusiastic teacher of unity, integrity and communal harmony and a strong nationalist who was proud to be an Indian. His poems are full of nationalistic fervor and his vision of a prosperous, harmonious and progressive India. He was a loving husband, an affectionate father, a compassionate brother and a doting grandfather full of rich experiences of life and lessons for his grandchildren.

My father, as a former Member of Parliament, was a well informed, politically astute, and highly influential individual. On the fateful day, anticipating the worst, my father made telephone call to the Police Commissioner P.C. Pandey (the highest police official in the

area), requesting adequate police protection to his family and the Society. Pandey came to my father's house, promised to send police protection, and left. Then in spite of repeated calls from him and several of his friends including the leader of the Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi, no police protection was sent. These pleas asking for protection went on for over 4 hours, until the rioters chopped off the telephone and power lines to his house and started burning the house. Not one single police constable was sent.

Without any police presence to worry about, the Hindu extremists pried out the air conditioning unit of the house, and tossed kerosene bombs inside. When my father realized that there was no hope to protect the lives gathered in his house, he stepped out of his house with folded hands and asked the leaders of the mob to take him with them but to spare the innocents inside the house. One of the leaders slashed at him with his sword, and while my father lay bleeding, they dragged him out on the road and burnt. They also did not spare the lives of those inside the house. The house was burnt with those innocent Muslim women and children trapped inside.

When the rampaging mob was done, and the police finally arrived, we could not even find my father's body. Later on, based on a few of his personal belongings, we collected a few body parts and some ashes from the road and buried him. Because we knew that my mother needed him the most in her life, and now she needed that grave on which she could lay her head and cry.

This is not a tragedy of one life. This is not an isolated incident of lawlessness. This is not a singular failure of the State to protect a citizen. The politics of hate, spawned by extreme religious zealots, has instigated a pogrom, which increasingly seems like a genocide. There are more than 100,000 Muslim men, women and children, who have lost everything including their jobs, homes, valuables and the lives of many relatives.

Those who were fortunate enough to survive are currently living in more than 50 relief camps, which are mostly supported by the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and other compassionate individuals. The government of the State of Gujarat did not even take the responsibility of relief operations. The Prime Minister of India did not come to visit Gujarat until 5 weeks later.

The camps are over crowded. The people are living in unsanitary conditions with a serious scarcity of food and medicines. There are more than 2000 people per camp with fewer than 20 toilets. Disease is widespread. The high temperatures of the summer are doing a lot of damage to the elderly and young children. Soon the monsoon rains will bring other infections and diseases. There is a need for urgent relief and rehabilitation to these victims.

The government of the State of Gujarat announced a compensation of Rs. 200,000 (\$4,000) for each of the Godhra victims, which were predominantly Hindus and Rs. 100,000 (\$2,000) for each of the other victims, which were predominantly Muslims. Their ideology of treating Muslims as second-class citizens is clearly reflected in their actions.

Attempts to seek justice are thwarted by the police. The police refuse to accept individual complaints of murder or rape. They have not arrested individuals who have participated in these atrocities. Where individuals file complaints, the police intimidate them to withdraw the complaints. These practices have been identified in detail in extensive articles in The Washington Post, The New York Times, and other newspapers.

When the terror tactics developed by Hindu extremists are supported by the state agencies, then the plight of the minority requires international intervention. Out of hundreds of petitions filed against the police and other pogrom related atrocities and excesses, the only petition the Gujarat High Court has accepted is the one filed by The Karuna Foundation challenging the validity of the National Human Rights Council report, which indicted the state government and the police for the carnage.

There is a need to bring normalcy to Gujarat. The riots are still continuing. Lives are still being lost. People in the relief camps are still afraid to return to what is left of their homes, rebuild them and rebuild their shattered lives. The culprits and murderers are roaming free. There is no security. And as long as there is no security, there can not be any normalcy. Security means arresting the criminals and perpetrators of violence, prosecuting them and putting them behind bars. Let the law take its course in punishing the guilty. This should be done regardless of religion or position. I request you to do everything in your power to ensure that the justice is served in Gujarat and that Muslims in India do not have to be deprived of the protections of the Constitution of India. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard.