

I thank USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler, Vice Chair Asif Mahmood, and all Commissioners for providing the platform to share today.

I am John. I am a Kuki from Manipur. I teach theology in a seminary. I also pastor a church. Currently, I left my academic position and work with persecuted Christians in Manipur in the northeast of India.

The size of Manipur is 22,237 sq kilometres which makes up 0.7% of the total geographical boundary of India. Manipur is divided into two, the valley which is the most fertile part of the land occupied by the majority Meiteis Hindus and the rocky hills occupied by minority tribal Christian communities, the Kukis and the Nagas.

The ongoing violence against minority Christian communities in Manipur was started in the afternoon of May 3rd 2023 when all tribal students of Manipur organize a peaceful solidarity rally against perceived systematic threat to their rights. It was sad to see that on that day the perpetrators carried out the attack freely with no one to stop them and within the first few days, they were able to destroy most of the Kuki villages in the foothills of Imphal valley. They were also able to attack and destroyed most of the churches in the valley belonging to Meitei Christians. Many of those Meitei churches were supported by tribal Christians in the Hills as they became Christians ahead of them.

In these attacks, the main target was the church. Church was the main target because it is the symbol of the people's faith, identity and hope. When you want to uproot or suppress a community, you attack their religion/church that is the root and foundation of the people. This was why the church was the main target during this violence.

The latest estimation of churches, institutions and church properties destroyed belonging to both the Kukis and the Meiteis is somewhere 500. The number is higher than previous records as the Present Rule enables the Meitei Christians to openly share about their losses. These churches and church properties belong to different denominations including, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army and many independent churches. The ongoing persecution affected all denominations and Christian communities.

In fact, during this campaign against the minority Christian communities, many Meitei Christians in the valley were made to leave Christianity and join Sanamahism, a traditional religion of majority Meitei community. The process of reconversion entails, according to one Meitei pastor, personally burning of the Bibles, removing of all Christian elements in their homes, joining meetings and then signing of an affidavit. (New Line Magazine quoted in PUCL, p214). For this reason, many Meitei Christians had to stop contact their sponsoring Kuki churches in the hills.

In the case of the minority Kukis, the entire population has been wiped out from the majority Meitei populated Imphal and other parts of the valley. Prior to that their doors were marked first and then attack like the Passover night in Egypt. All the government servants, students, doctors and politicians were chased out of Imphal, the capital of Manipur.

In Manipur, Kuki communities formed around 16 per cent and the Meiteis 66 percent of the total population. Kukis have 10 members in the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly while the Meiteis have 40 seats. Unlike the autonomous District Councils under the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution, the District Council in Manipur has no legislative, judicial, and financial power. They are powerless.

It was in a situation that the perpetrators continued their campaign escort free, looted six thousand weapons and ammunitions from a security post in Imphal, many of our women were handed over to men for rape by their women, two of them were paraded naked and gangraped, some were beheaded and part of their bodies were hung on the trees, dragged and mocked. Kukis were completely cleansed from the valley and the foothills of Manipur and the continued campaign against them prevent them to return to their homes.

The question is asked why the violence appears more of communal than religious. The answer is twofold: one, the ongoing Christian persecution is not spontaneous but preplanned and supported by Hindu right-wing groups in India. It has been designed in such a way that religious element is covered up and if anyone speaks of it faces severe consequences. This is to escape interference from international communities. Secondly, for fear of further persecution, the Kukis are scare of speaking up alone. Both David Campanale in his IRFBA reports and the British foreign Secretary and Ex Prime Minister David Cameron in his statement to the Lords have rightly pointed out the fact that the ongoing violence in Manipur definitely has religious element and they are absolutely right base on our experiences in the ground.

After two years and eight months, today, the situation is still grim with victims in hundreds of relief camps not knowing where to go. They cannot return and rebuild their homes and churches as the threat continues. At the same time, they have no resources to support themselves anywhere. Furthermore, the little support that they received from the Govt has gradually drop. Besides those in relief camps, the entire Kuki communities are facing extreme vulnerability. Since May 2023, we have no access to airports, national highways through the state capital Imphal, health care, education, government facilities and political representation. At the same time, we are not allowed to make bridges by ourselves to cross rivers or construct roads in the hills to connect our villages in emergency. On the new year eve this year, two drivers drove into a deep water in the nights and died while returning home from doping a dead body at an interior village. In the month of November 2025, four

teenage boys were killed by the Army without any warrant but there were no investigation until now. The minority tribal Kuki Christians are facing continued marginalization and threat of destruction.

In this extreme suffering and feeling of helplessness many are at the verge of giving up their faith in God; many are unable to send their children for education; many have turn to drinking and ended up being addicted; increase in slum type settlements and crises and this will only become worse unless someone intervene.

I request the US Government to help protect minority Christians in India in the following ways:

1. to reach out to our Indian Prime Minister to protect minority Christians, particularly the powerless minority Kuki tribal Christians in Manipur.
2. to reach out to our Indian Prime Minister to protect minority Kuki Christians in Manipur by safeguarding their faith, culture, land and resources from being extracted without their consent.
3. to reach out to American companies in India to support victims of the ongoing persecution through their corporate social responsibilities (CSR) funds.
4. to include the protection of Christians in Manipur as part of the US economic deals with India.
5. to send a third party and unbiased investigation team to Manipur to find a lasting solution to this prolong suffering.

I earnestly request the US Government to intervene the ongoing persecution and protect our religion. By doing this, the US government will not only help us but also strengthen the spirit of freedom and equality in India and across the world.