News
Ministry



Jesuit Fr. A Santhanam (center), convener of the National Lawyers Forum of Religious and Priests, is pictured with other national body members. (Courtesy of UCA News)

by UCA News

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The legal cell of Catholic lawyer-priests and nuns has vowed to extend help to Indian minorities, including Christians, as persecution against them increases in India.

"We have decided to provide legal help to the victims of atrocities and discrimination from the minority communities, especially Christians, irrespective of their denominational differences," said Fr. Bondala Sleeva Raju, Telegu regional convener of the National Lawyers' Forum of Religious and Priests, or NLFRP.

The regional forum is based in the southern Telugu region, covering India's two Telugu-speaking states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Our teams will extend the help "free of cost" as our primary objective is to protect the rights of the country's minorities, Raju told UCA News on Dec. 9 after a three-day convention of the National Lawyers' Forum of Religious and Priests concluded in Eluru in Andhra Pradesh on Dec. 8.

We are concerned about Christians amid rising persecution against them over alleged charges of religious conversion, the priest attached to Vijayawada Diocese in Andhra Pradesh added.

Eleven states, most of them ruled by pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party governments, have enacted a draconian anti-conversion law that curbs the citizen's right to change religion without prior approval from government officials.

These laws often target Christians and Muslims, the National Lawyers' Forum of Religious and Priests meeting noted.

"Those willing to convert to these religions will have to go through a tedious legal process, but no restrictions are there if a Christian or a Muslim converts to Hinduism as it is termed *ghar vapasi* [homecoming]," it added.

Fr. A Santhanam, the NLFRP's national convener, said, "We have formed a 15-member national crisis management team."

"They will work with like-minded people," Santhanam, a Jesuit priest based in southern Tamil Nadu, told UCA News on Dec. 9.

Bishop Jaya Rao Polimera of Eluru urged the participants to work to uphold the "dignity and rights of citizens" after taking lessons from the Bible and the Indian

Constitution.

Bishop Raja Rao of Vijayawada urged them to pay greater attention to defending the rights of "orphans and widows" who often do not have anyone to support them.

The prelate stressed the importance of caring for the vulnerable and elderly and sharing resources as "wealth is meant to be shared, not hoarded."

The National Lawyers' Forum of Religious and Priests, set up in 2017, has some 200 members nationwide.

Editor's note: *This story was originally published at UCA News.*