Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 7, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
H-232 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker,

We are writing to reiterate our strong support for the growing partnership between the United States and India, the world's largest democracy with approximately one-sixth of the total world population. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit comes at a critical juncture for this relationship, and as you stated, his visit "presents a special opportunity to hear from the elected leader of the world's most populous democracy on how our two nations can work together to promote our shared values and to increase prosperity." We respectfully request that during your meetings with the Prime Minister, the "shared value" of the fundamental right of religious freedom will be a priority in your conversation.

As you may know, religious minority communities – including Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Sikhs – have endured ongoing violence and harassment for decades in India, and continue to live in a climate where known perpetrators commit violence with impunity. During anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002, as many as 2,000 Muslims, including women and children, were killed and more than 100,000 were forced from their homes. In 2007 and 2008, similar attacks by Hindu nationalists against Christians in Odisha left nearly 40 people dead, churches and homes destroyed, and nearly 10,000 people displaced. More recently, in 2013, violence by Hindu extremists against Muslims in Uttar Pradesh resulted in nearly 40 deaths, at least a dozen women and girls raped, and more than 50,000 people displaced. Further, Hindus who oppose these violent tactics against religious minorities have been harassed and intimidated by government authorities.

Human rights groups in India have reported extensively on these types of attacks, and have traced many of them to Hindu nationalist groups and to government officials supportive of those groups. As a result of those groups and officials supporting extremists, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and other religious minority communities continue to experience incidents of discrimination, intimidation, harassment and violent attacks. Unfortunately, because of India's current climate of impunity with regard to such attacks, many victims may never receive justice.

In February of this year, 34 Members of the House and Senate wrote to Prime Minister Modi urging him to take steps to ensure the fundamental rights of religious minorities are protected and perpetrators of such violence are held accountable. In 2015, President Obama acknowledged concerns related to religious freedom in his remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast following his visit to India, stating, "…in past years, religious faiths of all types have, on occasion, been

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

targeted by other peoples of faith, simply due to their heritage and their beliefs -- acts of intolerance."

Prime Minister Modi has made public statements himself affirming religious freedom in India's pluralistic society, including his February 2015 commitment to "ensure that there is complete freedom of faith…and not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others." However, he has yet to publicly acknowledge and condemn a specific attack.

Mr. Speaker, we agree that the relationship between the United States and India is, as you stated, "a pillar of stability in an important region of the world." However, disregard for the fundamental human right of religious freedom for its citizens could potentially threaten the stability of India and undermine its leadership in global affairs. It is in the best interest of both the United States and India to reaffirm religious freedom as a shared value in this growing partnership, and ensure that conversation concerning justice and accountability for such horrific acts of violence continues.

We look forward to hearing from you about your dialogue with Prime Minister Modi around religious freedom, as your leadership also helps strengthen the relationship between our two nations.

Sincerely,

Trent Franks
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Patrick Meehan
Member of Congress

Keith J. Rothfus
Member of Congress

Randy K. Weber
Member of Congress

Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

John Conyers Jr.
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Robert B. Aderholt
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

David G. Valadao
Member of Congress