

**August 20, 2002. Yahoo (IANS). Vasantha Arora.
Armitage urged to take up Gujarat violence with India**

Washington, Aug 20 (IANS) The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to take up with the Indian government the largely anti-Muslim religious violence in Gujarat.

Armitage, who visits South Asia this week, was also called upon to discuss with President Pervez Musharraf the killings of Christians in Pakistan.

In a letter to Armitage, the Commission, which advises President George Bush and the U.S. Congress, voiced grave concern that none of the senior U.S. officials who visited India recently thought it right to take up the violence in Gujarat that has claimed at least 1,000 lives since February-end.

"Clearly it is important that the U.S. speak out publicly against such religion-based extremist violence, all the more so in view of our country's war on terrorism," said the letter by the Commission's chairperson Felice D. Gaer.

The Commission recently held a Congressional hearing on Gujarat and heard testimony from the families of the victims, non-governmental groups and South Asia experts like Bob Hathaway, who is in charge of the Asia programme in the Woodrow Wilson Centre, a reputed think tank in Washington DC.

Gaer said: "In India we urge you (Armitage) to express publicly the U.S. government's profound concern about the widespread killings of Muslims in Gujarat earlier this year."

Sparked by the killing of 58 people on a train, including many Hindu rightwing activists, Hindu fanatics killed at least 1,000 Muslims. Many were killed in a brutal fashion.

Although some U.S. administration officials have commented in response to questions by reporters about the "horrible violence in Gujarat" and about their expectation that the Indian government would "do the right thing, as far as we know no senior U.S. administration official has expressed concern over the killings or called for accountability for those responsible".

In fact, Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that the violence in Gujarat "did not come up in any of the conversations I had in both India and in Pakistan" during his recent visit to the region.

The Commission has, therefore, asked Armitage to specifically raise the issues of Gujarat and attacks on Christians in Pakistan.

The letter went on to say that although the Indian government has taken some positive steps, the situation in Gujarat remained "highly volatile". It said the National Human Rights Commission of India had detailed evidence of premeditation by members of Hindu extremist groups, complicity by Gujarat government officials and police inaction in the face of orchestrated violence against Muslims.

In Pakistan, Gaer said: "We urge you to similarly speak out publicly against attacks on Christian targets, reportedly by Islamic extremists. Pakistan's government should forcefully combat such violence, punish its perpetrators, and work more effectively to foster an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for the rights of everyone, regardless of religion or belief.

"Unlike in the case of the terrible murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, the Pakistan government has not demonstrated a similar resolve to find and bring to justice those directly responsible for attacks against Christians."

The letter expressed the hope that Armitage would underline the Commission's conclusion that discriminatory religious legislation in Pakistan (notably, the blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws) promoted religious intolerance that in turn encouraged acts of sectarian and religiously motivated violence.

Also, despite the proposed law to reform madrassas, too many Pakistan's Islamic religious schools continue to provide ideological training and motivation to those who go on to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and who take part in violence targeting religious minorities in Pakistan, the letter pointed out.

Saying that there were many interests that the U.S. government must pursue in each of these countries, Gaer felt that Armitage should express grave concern over religious freedom concerns in his dialogue with the governments in South Asia.

"This is important not least because it is the protection of religious freedom and other human rights that has proven often to be the most effective guarantor that other U.S. interests will be advanced," the letter said.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to give independent recommendations to the executive branch and the Congress.

**September 17, 2002. Times of India (India).
How normal is Gujarat: US consul-general asks officials**

GANDHINAGAR: Top government officials tried to project that the new US consul-general Angus T Simmons' Gujarat visit on Monday was a "routine call".

Yet, his pointed questions to Governor S S Bhandari, chief secretary G Subba Rao and additional chief secretary (home) Ashok Narayan on the postriot scenario suggested that the American diplomat came on a fact-finding mission on the communal situation here.

Simmons, who held separate meetings with officials and the governor, particularly wished to know from top state dignitaries whether they expected any retaliation from the minorities after so many killings had taken place.

He asked whether the situation had calmed down for both Hindus and Muslims, and whether it was safe for new investors to come here.

The head of the US mission in Mumbai was told that the state was now "absolutely normal".

This was proved by the fact that the village panchayats had gone to polls, religious festivals had taken place without any hitches, and now preparations were on for Assembly elections. On the state's investment climate, Simmons was told the situation was "as normal as it could be in a recessionary atmosphere".

Significantly, Simmons did not visit the CM office. He had sought an appointment with Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who was away. As the CM was not here, he decided not to interact with any official in Modi's office. During his meetings, Simmons did not reveal what he or the US government thought of Gujarat.

Earlier, Simmons met several non-government organisations and intellectuals in Ahmedabad to find out whether justice would be provided to riot victims, whether the situation was ripe for polls, whether there was any discrimination against Muslims six months after the riots.

His political adviser Scott Ticknor, who has been a frequent visitor to the state, accompanied Simmons.

December 20, 2002. Silicon India.

American expert compares Gujarat with Nazi Germany

NEW DELHI: When American legal expert Rhonda Copelon heard how Hindu rightwing leaders in Gujarat had demonised Muslims ahead of polls there, she was reminded of Nazi Germany.

"Hindu leaders created fear in the minds of Hindus by telling them a day would come when their sons would not return home as they would be kidnapped and killed by their Muslim neighbours," Copelon told IANS.

"Such fear mongering got them what they wanted -- victory," she said, referring to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) sweeping election victory in Gujarat this month.

Copelon along with a panel of women activists from the U.S., Sri Lanka, Britain and Germany visited the riot-torn state from December 14 to 17, coinciding with the Gujarat polls and its results.

They went there at the invitation of the International Initiative for Justice, formed by over a dozen Indian women's groups.

"The Hindu leaders literally forced Hindus to look at their Muslim neighbours as demons," she said. "We were stunned to hear of such speeches at a time when Gujarat was limping back to normalcy."

At least 1,000 people had died in sectarian violence from February-May in Gujarat.

"When there are signs of hate propaganda, organised crime and no hope of redress from the state, it signals to be a genocide. After seeing the mass destruction I think what happened in Gujarat was similar to the suffering caused in Nazi Germany," she said.

Copelon, who is a law professor at City University of the New York School of Law, said they were interacting in a huge hall with Muslims women when the Gujarat election results were announced.

"There was a killing silence and terror was writ large on everyone's faces."

She asked a woman sitting next to her what the victory of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP meant to them, and was told: "They will never let us survive".

Copelon said the importance of the visit was relevant in the context of the post-election scenario.

The panellists, which also included Indian women activists, called for a "genocidal alert" in Gujarat, describing the violence that was perpetrated in the state earlier this year.

Copelon said the international community, organisations and the U.N. bodies should declare a genocidal alert in Gujarat "to put international pressure on India to avoid a repeat" of the anti-Muslim violence that took place in Gujarat.

Copelon, who is also director of the International Women's Human Rights Clinic, said "legitimate investigation and prosecution" should be carried out against police and other officials.

Alleged members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena who participated in the violence should be investigated and prosecuted.

Nira Yuval-Davis, a professor in gender and ethnic studies at the University of Greenwich in London, who was also part of the panel, said: "We were all moved to tears on seeing the extent of damage. The Muslims have a feeling of hopelessness."

Summed up Farah Naqvi, a writer and founder of women's group Nirantar: "We are tired of the legal system. The government should act against perpetrators of the crime, otherwise accept that we are a weak democracy."

May 14, 2003. Times of India (India).

Minorities in India subjected to severe violence: US

WASHINGTON: Alleging that there has been an increase in violence against minorities with the rise in political influence of groups associated with Sangh parivar, a US government body has renewed its call for designating India among the "countries of particular concern" that would invite sanctions under American laws.

In its annual report, the US commission on International Religious Freedom said "despite India's democratic traditions, religious minorities in India have periodically been subject to severe violence, including mass killings."

"It has become increasingly clear," says the report, "that an increase in such violence has coincided with the rise in political influence of groups associated with the Sangh Parivar."

With the rise in power of the Sangh Parivar's political wing, Bharatiya Janata Party, "the climate of immunity for the perpetrators of attacks on minorities appears to have strengthened," says the Commission, which was created by Congress to make recommendations to it and the Government.

The Commission renewed its recommendation calling upon the Secretary of State to designate as "countries of Particular Concern" India, Pakistan, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.

It criticised the State Department for not following its recommendation, which would subject these countries to certain sanctions under US laws.

February 11, 2005. The Telegraph (India). K.P.Nayar.

Gujarat Muslims on US radar

Washington, Feb. 10: President George W. Bush's pledge last month to bring democracy to oppressed peoples throughout the world will soon reach Muslims in Gujarat if the US state department under its new secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, has its way.

The department's bureau of democracy, human rights and labour yesterday announced its support for projects in Gujarat aimed at bringing legal redress to Muslims.

Describing Indian Muslims as "marginalised", it announced support for building civil society for the minority community nationwide and for programmes aimed at promoting their inclusiveness.

A total of \$15 million has been set apart for such projects worldwide during the financial year 2005. The state department has invited organisations to submit proposals which focus on promotion of human rights, political participation, media freedom, rule of law, women's rights and civil society among Muslims.

The bureau for democracy, human rights and labour, notorious for its intrusion in countries that Washington is not comfortable with, has been funding or helping similar programmes since 1998.

But this is the first time that it is offering to directly get involved in India either for promoting human rights or civil society on behalf of the country's minorities. Its only other programme which had an Indian element was held five years ago, when it spent \$275,000 on a meeting in Delhi on global democracy.

After the September 11 attacks, the bureau contributed half-a-million dollars to a programme in support of elections in Pakistan. The bureau also gave \$250,000 for setting up an independent human rights commission in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

All through this, the bureau has steered clear of India. Even a "partnership to eliminate sweatshops programme" announced last year did not focus on India.

The decision to bring India under the bureau's radar is being linked to fears in the Bush administration of a rise in the influence of the religious right.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. US Response

Some Pakistani lobbies had tried to get America to blacklist India after the Gujarat riots but former secretary of state Colin Powell had rejected such proposals.