

IN BAD FAITH? BRITISH CHARITY AND HINDU EXTREMISM

REPORT SUMMARY

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Violent hate politics against Muslim and Christian minorities has grown massively in India in recent years. This resulted in the death of 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, and the displacement of 200,000 more in the state of Gujarat in 2002. Victims included British citizens. The ideology behind this hate-driven politics is called 'Hindutva.' The organization at the core of Hindutva activities is the extremist, paramilitary, Fascist-inspired Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is dedicated to turning India from a secular democratic multi-religious society into an authoritarian anti-minority 'Hindu nation'. Gandhi's murderer was an RSS activist. The RSS and its family of closely-allied organizations have been repeatedly indicted over several decades by international and Indian human rights organizations, judicial commissions and official bodies for their role in large scale violence and hatred against minority groups, including the Gujarat pogroms in 2002.

The report demonstrates that

- ▶ The extremist RSS's front organizations have received millions of pounds raised from the British public. These funds were collected by the Leicester-based registered charity, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and its fundraising arm Sewa International.
- ▶ HSS and Sewa International are UK branches of the RSS and the main purpose of their fundraising is to channel money to extremist RSS fronts in India, despite their claim to be non-sectarian, non-religious, non-political and purely humanitarian organizations (see Box 1).
- ▶ Sewa International's deep connections with the extremist RSS were not made known to donors and the British public who gave funds in good faith for Indian humanitarian causes. These connections were also unknown to patrons of Sewa International appeals (see Box 1, Box 2).
- ▶ The overwhelming bulk of funds HSS and Sewa International collected from the British public in the name of charity, including for humanitarian relief after the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 and the Orissa cyclone in 1999, were given to extremist RSS fronts in India (see Box 2).
- ▶ RSS allies funded from UK public donations include groups directly involved in large scale violence and the promotion of hatred (see Box 3). Funds from the UK intended for disaster relief were used to expand and glorify the hate-driven RSS's networks in India (see Box 2).

The report recommends that

- ▶ The charitable status of HSS and other associated charities should be withdrawn and public sector funding and political patronage of these organizations should end (see Box 4).

BOX 1

HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (HSS) IS THE UK BRANCH OF THE RSS MAIN PURPOSE OF SEWA INTERNATIONAL IS TO RAISE FUNDS FOR RSS PROJECTS EXTENT OF DEEP RSS CONNECTION NOT MADE PUBLIC

- ▶ The Leicester-based HSS, a registered charity, is a branch of the Indian RSS. It runs about 70 weekly physical and ideological training cells in the UK. The HSS is modelled on the RSS, actively promotes RSS ideology and shares the RSS aim of turning India into an exclusive 'Hindu nation'. The RSS in India considers the HSS to be its UK branch. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad UK and the Kalyan Ashram Trust UK, both registered charities, are also branches of the RSS family operating in the UK. The full report details numerous, extensive, deep and active connections between the HSS and the RSS.

- ▶ Sewa International is the fundraising arm of the HSS. The main purpose of Sewa International is to raise funds from the British public for RSS projects in India. Sewa International and the HSS have misled donors, the public and patrons about their long-standing, deep and committed relationship with the Indian RSS. Neither Sewa International nor the HSS informed donors and the public that their donations were used almost exclusively to support RSS front organizations, and that the main purpose of HSS and Sewa International fundraising is to channel money to these RSS fronts.
- ▶ Funds raised by Sewa International from British donors and the public have run into millions of pounds. The overwhelming bulk of these funds have been channelled to RSS front organizations.
- ▶ Sewa International is not a registered charity. It uses the charity registration number of the HSS to raise funds from the British public.

BOX 2

EARTHQUAKE FUNDS FROM BRITISH PUBLIC USED TO EXPAND RSS NETWORKS & GLORIFY THE RSS VAST BULK OF PUBLIC FUNDS WERE GIVEN BY SEWA INTERNATIONAL TO RSS FRONTS

- ▶ An alarming chain links unsuspecting British donors to the active political promotion and glorification of the RSS. Charitable funds raised by Sewa International from the British public have been directly used to expand RSS institutions and networks in India, to further the aims, objectives and activities of RSS organizations, and to glorify the RSS and its leaders. Sewa International's activities around both the Gujarat earthquake (2001) and the Orissa cyclone (1999) demonstrate a pattern in which a natural, human tragedy is used to enable the dramatic expansion of RSS institutions through the use of overseas funds.

Gujarat earthquake 2001

- ▶ In key Gujarat earthquake fundraising appeals, Sewa International did not disclose its associations with the HSS or the RSS and it did not state that it was fundraising exclusively for RSS affiliates. This misled British donors and public, most of whom would have been horrified by the RSS's history, ideology and activities.
- ▶ All £2 million raised from the British public by Sewa International for Gujarat earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation from 2001 was for a major RSS affiliate, Sewa Bharati. Sewa Bharati is dedicated to creating an exclusive Hindu nation. Sewa Bharati's reconstruction work was directly related to furthering the RSS's political agenda, including through the organization of RSS cells. A key pattern found was that Sewa International funded Sewa Bharati for rebuilding work, but it was the RSS that conducted ceremonies for the start of rebuilding work or handed over the completed village to residents.
- ▶ One rebuilt village (Chapredi) included an important dedication plaque glorifying the RSS, its founder and a key RSS affiliate. A Hindu temple topped with saffron flags was built in the village. No evidence was found of Sewa International funding the building of mosques or churches, though many of these were destroyed in the earthquake.
- ▶ The RSS supreme leader K. S. Sudarshan undertook the foundation stone laying ceremony for one village (Mithapasvaria). The new village was handed over to residents by senior RSS leaders. The RSS supreme leader K. S. Sudarshan undertook the opening ceremony for another village (Rapar) during which he urged residents to expand the RSS network in the area. Funds were raised for this village through a multicultural event in the UK. RSS physical and ideological training cells were started by Sewa Bharati during the rebuilding and rehabilitation period for another village (Badanpur).
- ▶ Sewa International claimed to fund the reconstruction of anywhere from 10 to 25 villages. It also claimed to have totally funded the reconstruction of 10 villages. Six villages were found in which Sewa International funds were used for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Other fundraising

- ▶ A large proportion of the £260,000 raised by Sewa International for Orissa cyclone relief (1999) went to enable the expansion of major RSS affiliates. Funds were used for building RSS schools. The RSS and its leaders were glorified. The HSS said Orissa cyclone funds would be channelled through RSS volunteers and given to organizations which get their workforce from the RSS.
- ▶ The extremely close involvement of the RSS, its supreme leader and its senior figures, as well as the blatant promotion and glorification of the RSS in both the Gujarat earthquake and Orissa cyclone work, is sufficient to raise questions regarding Indian legal regulations that prohibit the RSS from receiving overseas funds.
- ▶ The main education projects for which Sewa International raises funds from the British public are RSS and VHP-run. These extremist education projects have a political purpose for the RSS and the VHP, a fact not disclosed by Sewa International to donors or the public. Funds raised by Sewa International's 'education aid' wing are significant, running into hundreds of thousands of pounds.
- ▶ Each of the 'supported projects' for which Sewa International raises funds from the British public is an RSS project or is linked to the RSS.
- ▶ Sewa International raises funds from the British public for 'one-teacher schools'. These are extremist political projects run by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Sewa Bharati, Vidya Bharati and other RSS / VHP affiliates.
- ▶ Over a three year period, we found mentioned in HSS UK literature a small amount of a few thousand pounds donated by Sewa International to non-Indian causes.

BOX 3**SEWA INTERNATIONAL FUNDS ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED OR IMPLICATED IN VIOLENCE****SEWA INTERNATIONAL FUNDS ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN HATRED**

- ▶ Funds raised by Sewa International have been given to RSS organizations in India whose members and followers have been involved or implicated in large scale anti-minority violence or religious hatred, despite Sewa International's denials.
- ▶ Sewa International and the Kalyan Ashram Trust UK (a registered charity) raise funds for the RSS arm, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), which has been responsible for considerable violence and hatred against Christian and Muslim groups, including during the Gujarat carnage in 2002.
- ▶ Sewa Bharati, the key recipient of Sewa International Gujarat earthquake funds had its license to operate in Madhya Pradesh revoked by the state government because of alleged violence against Christians. Allegations of violence against Christians by Sewa Bharati in Madhya Pradesh continue.
- ▶ Some Gujarat earthquake appeal funds collected by Sewa International from the British public were for the RSS-allied Lok Kalyan Samiti in Chanasma village, which has been implicated in the violent 'cleansing' of all Muslims from the village and the illegal occupation of premises and land previously under the charge of the statutory Muslim waqf board.
- ▶ Some Gujarat earthquake appeal funds collected by Sewa International from the British public were for the RSS's Border Jankalyan Samiti in Gujarat. The Jankalyan Samiti's Maharashtra branch was responsible for attacks on Christian organizations.
- ▶ Sewa International also raises funds for projects, such as 'one-teacher schools', that involve the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an Indian organization at the forefront of anti-minority violence and hatred in India. The purpose of these schools is to oppose Christians and what the RSS calls 'subversion' and 'anti-national' tendencies.

- ▶ Almost a quarter of Sewa International earthquake funds raised from the British public were for building sectarian, highly controversial RSS schools. These schools are mainly run by the RSS's Vidya Bharati, whose teaching material has been condemned by India's statutory National Council for Educational Research and Training as blatantly promoting bigotry, fanaticism and hatred.
- ▶ There are serious allegations that the RSS discriminated against Muslims and dalits in earthquake relief, and that the RSS and its allies attacked and intimidated secular NGOs undertaking relief work. Earthquake relief work by RSS allies was accompanied by violence and hatred against Christians.
- ▶ Despite their repeated claims to be non-sectarian and non-discriminatory, Sewa International, the HSS or the VHP UK did not launch any humanitarian appeal following the Gujarat carnage in 2002 carried out by Hindutva supremacist groups in which 2,000 people died, mostly Muslims, and over 200,000 citizens of India were displaced.

BOX 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of their role in funding, promoting or glorifying RSS organizations that have been directly responsible for or implicated in serious, large scale sectarian violence, hatred or violation of human rights in India:

- ▶ The charitable status of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh UK, Vishwa Hindu Parishad UK and Kalyan Ashram Trust UK (all branches of the extremist RSS family) **be withdrawn by the UK Charity Commission.**
- ▶ The **Charity Commission take appropriate action against the trustees** of HSS. HSS / Sewa International fundraising appeals for Indian causes were not transparent and did not disclose to the public that funds were being raised for and sent to extremist and sectarian RSS organizations.
- ▶ Donors and the public **refuse to give funds** to the HSS, Sewa International, the VHP UK and their allied organizations.
- ▶ Politicians, public and voluntary sector organizations, religious and community groups **publicly dissociate** from the HSS, the VHP UK and their allied organizations.

NOTE ON METHODS

The report is based on

- ▶ Site visits to Gujarat villages in September 2003
- ▶ Interviews in Gujarat from March–May 2003
- ▶ Interviews in the UK, US and other parts of India during 2003
- ▶ Analysis of paper and electronic documents, mostly from Hindutva organizations.