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Written statement* submitted by The International Humanitarian Society for Development Without Borders, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



India: Violent Attacks On Sikhs and Their Properties In Delhi

The assassination of Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi on 31st October 1984 was the event that led to violent attacks on Sikhs and their properties in Delhi and across the country. Brutal violence in Delhi erupted that very same night and continued for the following two days where Sikh properties were looted and burnt on a very large scale. The attacks began to improve on the third day (03.11.84) although it wasn't up until the fifth day (05.11.84) when the violence was significantly contained.

The brutal killing, looting and raping of Sikhs took place in Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Jammu & Kashmir, Chattisgarh, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra.

In the Home Minister's statement, on the floor of the Rajya Sabha, it was said that the number of Sikhs killed in Delhi and other regions during the November 1984 riots was 2,146 and 586 people respectively. Although studies suggest the actual number of killings far surpass the figures stated in the Rajya Sabha. It was also felt that the Delhi Police was not only negligent in protecting the Sikhs and their properties but likely instigated or colluded with such attacks. Considering the feelings of the Sikh community and criticism of the bodies concerned with protection of human rights and civil liberties, the Government of India appointed a Commission headed by Mr. Justice Ranganath Mishra, the then Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 "to inquire into the allegations in regard to the incidents of organized violence which took place in Delhi and also the disturbances which took place in the Bokaro Tehsil, Chas Tehsil and at Kanpur and to recommend measures which may be adopted for prevention of recurrence of such incidents." This inquiry found that the incidents which took place on 31.10.84 were by way of involuntary reaction of a deep sense of grief, anguish and hatred for Indira Gandhi's assassins. That spontaneous reaction of the people soon transformed itself into riotous activity with participation and monitoring thereof by anti-socials due to passivity of the Delhi police. The Commission also found that the police was either indifferent or negligent in performance of its duties while those incidents were taking place and at times it also participated in them.

The 2005 Nanavti commission stated "The attacks were made in a systematic manner and without much fear of the police; almost suggesting that they were assured that they would not be harmed while committing those acts and even thereafter. Male members of the Sikh community were taken out of their houses. They were beaten first and then burnt alive in a systematic manner. In some cases tyres were put around their necks and then they were set on fire by pouring kerosene or petrol over them. In some cases white inflammable powder was thrown on them which immediately caught fire thereafter. This was a common pattern which was followed by the big mobs which had played havoc in certain areas. The shops were identified, looted and then burnt. Thus what had initially started, as an angry outburst became an organized carnage." The 'systematic' nature of the attacks, whereby men were beaten before being burnt alive. This therefore contradicts the common media portrayal of the 1984 events as "anti-Sikh riots", since a "riot" denotes actions that were sporadic and spontaneous. Instead, the atrocities committed are more accurately described as ethnic cleansing and a form of genocide. Sikhs were deliberately targeted in a strategic and coordinated manner. Then Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was sentenced to life imprisonment for the prominent role he played in organising the violence against the Sikhs. He was seen using electoral lists to help the rioter identify Sikh homes which were later looted and burned down. Sajjan Kumar was only sentenced in 2018, after over three decades after the offences but still no police officer has been convicted, and there were no prosecutions for rape, highlighting a comprehensive failure of the justice system. Lawyer Vrinda Grover, in her deposition to the Nanavati Commission in 2002, presented her analysis of judgments "It is clear that a combination of grave lapses of investigation, shoddy investigation, inordinate delays, insufficient collection evidence, non-compliance with legal procedures by the police led to a majority of cases concluding in acquittals. The acquittals were to a very large extent

a direct consequence of the incompetent, unprofessional and casual investigation by the police.”

Furthermore, an independent report claimed that incidents also included the burning of Sikh Places of Worship (Gurdwaras) and the Sikh scripture (the Guru Granth Sahib). 120 Sikhs working at the Bokaro Steel Plant Jharkhand were thrown alive into burning furnaces, whilst in Agartala, Tripura 40 Sikh families who took refuge in a police station were in fact burnt alive there, and in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh 12 Sikhs were hanged from the ceiling at the railway platform.

As a result of these mass riots, hundreds of Sikhs had to leave their homes and take refuge in relief camps or in other safer places. Many Sikh families lost their male members and thus suffered great emotional and heavy financial loss for years to come. In addition to the atrocities faced in 1984, there has still been no significant accountability for these events and it is evident that ethnic cleansing still continues today albeit in a more covert way to that of 1984. The Sikh minority continue to be a target without any culpability.
