

Opposition to the impending visit of United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to India

- 1) **US body should not interfere in Indian affairs: Shankaracharya**
Pioneer, June 13, 2009
TN Raghunatha | Mumbai

Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati on Friday vehemently opposed the impending visit of United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to India, by saying that it was nothing but “an intrusive mechanism of a foreign Government to interfere in the internal affairs of this country”.

“Though the Indian Government has permitted USCIRF for sending its delegation to this country to hold meetings with our people to ascertain religious freedom in our country, the delegation should actually not be allowed to enter this country on this intrusive mission. We will not allow external interference into our internal affairs,” the Shankaracharya said.

The Shankaracharya was interacting with the mediapersons after initiating the inter-faith dialogue with Christian leaders, including a cardinal from Vatican City in Rome, Jean Louis P Tauran and Cardinal Oswald Gracias from Mumbai.

Held at that the Shanmukhananda Hall in central Mumbai, the inter-faith dialogue — aimed at sending a message of peace and harmony to the people — was along the lines of a similar move undertaken by the Pope Benedict XVI to hold talks with the chief of Rabbinate of Israel at Jerusalem on May 12, 2009, to bolster religious tolerance between Jews and Catholics.

In a significant statement, the seer from the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt voiced his opposition to “forceful conversion” by any religion. “It has become easy for the missionaries to convert Hindus. All Hindu organisations and associations should work together to educate Hindus and eradicate conversion activity. We have conveyed this message to Christian leaders in the meeting,” the Shankaracharya said.

Echoing the sentiments expressed by the Shankaracharya vis-à-vis “forceful conversion”, Mumbai’s Cardinal Oswald Gracias said: “We will not encourage any forceful activities. This message will reach all the Christian organisations.”

The Shankaracharya also exhorted the Churches and Christian groups to utilise the funds received by them from abroad for social causes and not for religious conversions.

“We know that very large amounts of money come into this country for Churches and Christian groups, ostensibly for charitable work. These funds should be used only for social causes like health, education etc and should not be used for religious conversion. The Christian organisations should also distribute the funds received from abroad among various charitable institutions irrespective of their religious faith,” the Shankaracharya said.

The Shankaracharya went on to add: “... the Hindu dharma and the Hindus welcome Christians, Muslims, Parsis and Jews to make this land their home. We expect that these religions will not seek to destroy our faith,

religion and wound the religious sensibilities. We encourage all religions to live with mutual respect and harmony and in a shared sense of nationalism which should bind us all as one nation”.

The Shankaracharya also advised the churches in India against using Hindu religious words, phrases and symbols like Veda, Agama, Rishi, Ashrama and Om, as an “inculturation” tactic to deceive vulnerable sections of people targeted for religious conversion. He also urged the Indian Government to look into the reported efforts by some churches to script a new bible for new converts by usurping sections of sacred Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas and incorporating them into the Bible.

<http://www.dailypioneer.com/182645/US-body-should-not-interfere-in-Indian-affairs-Shankaracharya.html>

2) Interfaith Dialogue @ Mumbai - Press briefing by Kanchi Acharya

HH Sri Kanchi Sankaracharia’s briefing on June 12,2009

1. Exactly one month ago to the date, the Pope went to Jerusalem where Jesus was born, for a similar dialogue that the Vatican had undertaken with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. At the end of that meeting when the Pope and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger jointly addressed the Press and Media, the Chief Rabbi thanked the Pope for assuring the Chief Rabbinate that the Catholic Church would desist and cease from all missionary and conversion activities among the Jews. This is construed as endorsed and agreed by the Pope since he was present in the press meet. We need a similar commitment from the Church for Hindus.
2. After such inter-faith meetings, the points agreed have to be faithfully abided. Otherwise there will be no point in holding such meetings. Unless the Church reassures Hindus that it will not conduct itself in a manner that wounds Hindu sensibilities and follows up on those assurances, such inter-faith meetings, no matter how frequently they are held will be futile and will not serve any meaningful cause.
3. In 1999, Pope Johan Paul II had stated that the mission of the Vatican was to plant the Cross in Asia in the third millennium to facilitate the Christianizing of the world which alone would cause the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Pope must tell us the rationale for the First Coming of Jesus Christ when there was no Christianity or the Church to undertake the mission to Christianize the world.
4. We see the USCIRF (US Commission on International Religious Freedom) as an intrusive mechanism of a foreign government to interfere in the internal affairs of this country. The USCIRF which has been permitted to visit this country to hold meetings with our people to ascertain religious freedom in our country must no longer be permitted to enter this country on this intrusive mission. We will not allow external interference into our internal affairs.
5. We know that very large amounts of money come into this country for Churches and Christian groups, ostensibly for charitable work. These funds should be used only for social causes like health, education etc and should not be used for religious conversion. During these dialogues, it should be agreed that the funds should be distributed to all Organisations who

do charitable work irrespective of the organisations' religious faith. A common pool should be created and a Committee formed to distribute and monitor the usage of these funds.

6. It has become easy for the Missionaries to convert Hindus. All Hindu Organisations and Associations should work together to educate Hindus and eradicate the conversion activity.
7. Hindu dharma is by nature diverse and so all different panthas and sampradayas co-exist on this bhumi without seeking to destroy the others. Hindu dharma has nurtured and supported all faiths and religions because that is the way of dharma. We expect that religions which have come into this bhumi from other lands will respect this vital characteristic of Hindu dharma and not do anything to subvert or disturb the sense of nationhood of this country. Hindu dharma and the Hindu people welcome Christians and Muslims, Parsis and Jews to make this land their home. We expect from these religions that they will not seek to destroy our faith, our religion and wound our religious sensibilities. We encourage all religions to live with mutual respect and harmony in a shared sense of nationalism which should bind us all as one nation. Nationalism should come first.
8. We are aware of the preaching that they will cure diseases and ailments if the individual converts to their faith. This is illegal as per the DRUGS AND MAGIC REMEDIES ACT 1954.
9. Most of the countries in the world (USA, UK, Japan, Middle-east nations, Pakistan, Sri Lanka etc.), adopt national resolutions and statements of intent proclaimed by their governments and

their tallest religious bodies affirming their determination to protect and defend the culture and the religion from which their cultures derive. In India alone we pass resolutions which officially and legally promote an irreligious and unspiritual creed called secularism. Secularism is an administrative quality; it cannot be the soul of this nation. The soul of this nation is religious and spiritual. We call upon our government and other important religious bodies to recognize this truth and affirm their commitment to protect the soul of this nation.

10. The Buddhist Mahasangha and the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organizations have declared its intention to get the Sri Lankan government to pilot and pass a national anti-conversion Bill and make it law. We welcome this move and strongly endorse this measure.
11. The Church in India must stop forthwith the use of Hindu religious words, phrases and symbols like Veda, Agama, Rishi, Ashrama, Om and other such in what is referred to as 'inculturation' tactics but which are only intended to deceive the vulnerable sections of our people who are the intended targets for religious conversion. This is also insulting to and wounding the religious sensitivities of Hindus. Similarly it has been brought to our notice that some churches are scripting a new Bible for the new converts by usurping sections of our sacred Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas and incorporating them into the Bible. This must stop immediately and all such Bibles must be withdrawn from circulation. We urge the Indian government to look into the issue and do the needful.