

Interfaith Coalition Opposing The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Award to Mr. Modi

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
440 5th Avenue N
Seattle, WA 98109

Via Electronic Delivery

September 10, 2019

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gates:

As leaders of diverse faith communities, we are deeply disturbed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's decision to honor India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi with an award later this month. Prime Minister Modi and his Hindu-nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, have a well-documented and extensive history of human rights abuses against a range of religious minority communities throughout India, and in just the past month they have been responsible for unprecedented aggression against the people of Kashmir. As people of faith who share your foundation's belief that every life has equal value, we respectfully ask that you rescind that offer.

In the past month alone, Mr. Modi's government has completely cut off communications for over 8 million people in Kashmir, limited their access to food and critical medical care, closed schools, prevented media coverage of events in Kashmir, and allowed the Indian army to detain thousands of individuals including children. Especially concerning to us as faith leaders, there have been persistent reports that Kashmiris have been unable to visit major houses of worship, even during the most important religious holidays of the year.

The targeting of religious minority communities by Mr. Modi and the BJP is far from limited to Kashmir. In just this past year, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom twice condemned a veritable surge in attacks across India against Muslim, Christian, and Dalit Hindu communities while directly implicating Mr. Modi's government for its "allowance and encouragement of mob violence against religious minorities". In particular, it cited at least 365 major attacks on Christians and their institutions that affected more than 8,000 Christians. In Assam, nearly 2 million Bengali-Indians, the majority of whom are Muslims, will soon be declared stateless and in danger of

deportation. Many have lived there since pre-Indian independence yet are not recognized as citizens.

The hateful actions of Mr. Modi and his BJP government are also not new. In 2002, Modi was Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat and presided over the gruesome killing of over 2,000 Muslims. According to Human Rights Watch's ("HRW") own findings, "the attacks on Muslims throughout the state were planned...and organized with extensive police participation and in close cooperation with officials of the BJP."

We the undersigned are people of faith who heed a higher calling, and all of our faith traditions teach us to honor the dignity of every human being. The BJP, led by Mr. Modi, has massacred thousands of innocent people, stolen children from their families, violated fundamental human rights, and espoused a hateful, violent ideology. In the words of Suchitra Vijayan, a lawyer and executive director of the Polis Project, and Arjun Singh Sethi, a human rights lawyer and adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center, in their Washington Post op-ed this week, "Modi's sanitation campaign has no doubt benefited people, but how can access to a clean toilet outweigh the violence and persecution they may face in the rest of their lives?"

Honoring Mr. Modi, whose actions and words have consistently supported a message of division and a climate of hate towards religious minorities across India, is clearly not in alignment with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's values or the values of anyone who truly advocates for human rights. We respectfully request that you rescind this award.

Sincerely,

Salam Al-Marayati, President and co-Founder, The Muslim Public Affairs Council

Rev. Zachary Hoover, First Baptist Church of Pasadena

Tahil Sharma, Faith Outreach Manager, Brave New Films

Estee Chandler, Board Member, Jewish Voice for Peace

Randolph Dobbs, president emeritus Inter-Religious Council of Southern California, Religious Director - USC Office of Religious Life; Member of the Board of Directors - University Religious Conference UCLA

Rabbi Neil Comess-Daniels, Beth Shir Shalom

Rev. Mike Kinman, Rector, All Saints Episcopal Church

Rabbi Ken Chasen, Leo Baeck Temple

Reinhard Krauss, PhD., Executive Director, Academy for Judaic, Christian, and Islamic Studies

Stephen Rohde, Chair, Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace

Bishop Noriaki Ito, Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple

Dr Ahmed Soboh, Chairman, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California; Religious Director,
Chino Valley Islamic Center

Peace Catalyst International (as an organization)

Rick Love, Founder and President, Peace Catalyst International

Kevin Grable, Program Director, Peace Catalyst International