

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed Chairperson, and distinguished delegates,

I am Naila Saeed and I represent Canadian Council of Indian Muslims.

I approach you today with a heavy heart, deeply concerned about the challenges to inclusion and equality faced by religious minorities, particularly Muslims, in India, especially post 2014 after the Bharatiya Janata Party took power. The evolving situation demands our immediate attention and concerted efforts to address the pressing issues that have unfolded over the recent years.

India, celebrated for its diverse cultural fabric, is currently navigating a disconcerting reality. Despite being home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations, the minority community is grappling with heightened discrimination, prejudice, and violence. The leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has witnessed a concerning surge in anti-Muslim sentiments and policies, prompting critics to argue that the rights of millions of Muslims are being systematically ignored.

Secular principles embedded in India's constitution, with a commitment to equality, have faced severe tests, particularly in the wake of the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s.

Recent controversial actions by the BJP government, including the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), have heightened these concerns. The revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status and the subsequent crackdown on the region have intensified tensions. Discrimination against Muslims persists in various aspects of life, with reports of biased policing and attacks on religious freedoms.

Violence against Muslims, whether through targeted riots or extrajudicial measures like "bulldozer justice," continues unabated. The Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and the Gujarat riots in 2002 cast a long shadow on the country's recent history. More recently, anti-Muslim violence, fueled by inflammatory rhetoric, has become distressingly common.

The impact on Indian Muslim women transcends the challenges faced by men in their community. The hijab ban in the State of Karnataka in 2022 during the BJP rule deprived several Muslim girls of their constitutional right to education, expression, dignity and non-discrimination, said 'Closing the Gates to Education, Violations of Rights of Muslim Women Students in Karnataka,' a report released by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). A total of 1,010 hijab-wearing girls dropping out of PU colleges could be primarily due to this. Last year, photographs of more than 100 Muslim women, including prominent actress Shabana Azmi, wife of a sitting judge of Delhi High Court, multiple journalists, activists and politicians were displayed on an app for auction as "Bulli Bai" of the day. 'Bulli' is a derogatory word used for Muslim women in local slang. According to the PLFS 2021-22 report, the female labour force participation rate of Muslim women in the country is 15 per cent, as compared to 26.1 per cent for Hindu women. Over the past three years, Muslim women have had the lowest LFP rate amongst all religious groups in the country.

India just hosted the G-20 summit but the world must not be swayed solely by economic achievements but must also reckon with the darker narrative unfolding—the systematic marginalization of its Muslim minority. In the post-Modi era, we witness the persistence of troubling trends that demand our collective condemnation and decisive action.

International forums like the UN Forum on Minority Issues play a pivotal role in addressing such challenges. I implore this esteemed gathering to scrutinize and respond to the evolving situation in India, ensuring that the principles of inclusion, equality, and religious freedom are not compromised. It is our collective responsibility to stand against discrimination and intolerance and work towards a world where every individual, regardless of their faith, enjoys equal rights and opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity.