

THE HUMANISM PROJECT



24 May 2022

**The Hon'ble Anthony Albanese
Prime Minister of Australia**

Dear Hon'ble Prime Minister

Congratulations on your election victory. In these divisive times, your progressive values and leadership stands as a powerful beacon of hope to many on the frontlines, working towards a more equitable and humane world for all.

The Humanism Project (THP) is an Australian not-for-profit social justice advocacy group that represents the broad cultural, religious and regional diversity of India in Australia. We are part of a global network of civil society groups of Indians from across the political and social spectrum, who are concerned with the protection of human rights of all individuals.

We are writing to you regarding your upcoming meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi at the Quad Summit in Tokyo.

We are hopeful that under your leadership, the strategic partnership between the two nations will continue to grow, both at diplomatic and peoples' levels.

We are, however, concerned about India's recent record of assault on minorities, dissent, human rights and free speech.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has [recommended](#) in its 2022 report that the US designate India as a Country of Particular Concern for "engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing and egregious religious freedom violations," alongside the likes of China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran and Myanmar. USCIRF has recommended that the US "raise religious freedom issues in the US-India bilateral relationship and highlight concerns through hearings, briefings, letters, and congressional delegations."

The UN [Secretary-General](#), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and various UN [Special Rapporteurs](#) have expressed deep concern at India's democratic decline. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has even [joined litigation at India's Supreme Court](#) against a new citizenship law that discriminates against Muslims, which triggered mass protests.

India's press freedom ranking fell to 150 (out of 180 countries) this year. According to [Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF), "The violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis in "the world's largest democracy", ruled since 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right."

Reputed US democracy watchdog [Freedom House has rated India “Partly Free”](#) saying “the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has presided over discriminatory policies and a rise in persecution affecting the Muslim population.” In a separate report, [Indian Kashmir was rated “Not Free”](#) by Freedom House.

India is integral to the success of the Quad Alliance. But the Quad will only succeed if the partners have a shared belief in “the rule of law and standards of good governance,” [according](#) to Lavina Lee of Sydney’s Lowy Institute.

Lee says that “a region that becomes inhospitable to liberal democratic values at a domestic level is much less likely to support and reflect the principles of a free, open and inclusive international order.” That description fits present-day India.

A xenophobic and authoritarian India would destabilise the Quad, and Australia’s interests.

Australia’s silence on India’s human rights violations, suppression of dissent and free speech legitimize its autocratic authoritarianism.

Mr Modi has diluted land and forest rights and environmental norms. Hate speech is rife, peaceful protest criminalised, and the jails are filled with political prisoners. Amnesty International had to shut its office in 2020 amid raids, frozen bank accounts, and threats of imprisonment in India.

Australia cannot pretend India will be an able and stable partner in the face of all-round democratic and economic decline. Further, the resultant fissures within civil society in India are creating a direct and damaging ripple effect within the Indian diaspora in Australia. The increasingly emboldened right-wing assertions by the supporters of the current regime threaten the peace and harmony within the social fabric of our communities.

In our own interest, Australia must ask India to improve its attitude towards human rights.

In the light of the above, we request you,

- To raise Australia’s concerns over India’s democratic decline, in your meeting with Mr Modi
- To make discussion on human rights an essential part of strategic and trade negotiations between Australia and India

Upon your return, we would welcome an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue based on these pressing concerns and work with you to strengthen progressive values within our communities and institutions, for the benefit of all Australians. We wish you and your government a successful term in office.

Warm regards

The Humanism Project

Copy to: The Hon’ble Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs