

#HinduLivesMatter

#HinduLivesMatter Campaign HQ

(Campaign Launched by the Global Hindu Action Network)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#HinduLivesMatter Campaign Galvanizes the world against CNN's Denigrating Portrayal of Hinduism

Houston, Texas - (March 15th, 2017) - Protests erupted against CNN in major cities across the United States and in other parts of the world, for its derogatory portrayal of Hinduism in its first episode of the series 'Believer' that aired on Sunday, March 5th. In the episode, the narrator and host Reza Aslan, a Muslim, known for his anti-Christian stance, indulges in the worst form of Hinduphobia by denigrating a miniscule collective of Hindu spiritual practitioners called "the Aghoris", who are known for their unique spiritual practices. In the show, Reza mocks the spiritual practices of the Aghoris as exotica, without explaining the general philosophical basis of Hindu spirituality, and the derivative freedom that Hinduism provides its practitioners, to pursue the unique Spiritual Knowledge that is embedded in the kernel of Hinduism, and in a matter, that suits the individual. Without explaining this essential background, Reza's portrayal of Hinduism would be perceived as a cannibalistic cult. This would have been a hint for mainstream America to look at Hinduism as barbaric, and worthy of elimination from the USA.

CNN almost got away with its denigrating portrayal since, earlier, it had pre-screened the show for select office-bearers of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF). The HAF found no issues with the show during the pre-screening and issued an advisory for people to watch the program and make comments on it.

The Petition that went viral

CNN was emboldened to air the show as it met with no resistance at the pre-screening or right. Little did CNN know that an avalanche of popular upsurge of Hindus worldwide was waiting to vent their frustration and anger at the abject ignorance and the audacity of the Hinduphobes.

The Hindu *Mahasabha* of America (HMSA), started a petition, barely few days before the broadcast attracting more than 15,000 signatures right before the show. HMSA's petition lent voice to the angst of Hindus and was the catalyst in drawing widespread support with over 20,000 signatories till date and still counting <https://www.change.org/p/stop-reza-aslan-s-hateful-show-against-hinduism?>

Inspired by the petition, Global Hindu Action Network (GHAN), a collective of Hindu activists worldwide, immediately swung into action, right before the show and subsequently launched a campaign titled #HinduLivesMatter. Emails, phone calls and Whatsapp messages started pouring in from all corners of the globe. This massive upsurge in Hindu sentiments against CNN quickly worked its way up the leadership hierarchies of many Hindu organizations throughout the length and breadth of the USA. The Hindu community leaders, to respond to the angst and concern of their respective constituencies, caused by the intense bottom-up mobilization of the Hindus by the Network, had no other choice but to send a strong message to CNN, that such kind of behavior is and was not acceptable. They quickly helped organized protests in several cities. The protests were also held as far as in Nigeria.

Saturday, March 11th from 3 pm to 5 pm was the time chosen for multiple cities to organize these protests and various groups started mobilizing the people for these events. A centralized #HinduLivesMatter campaign team started coordinating with all the organizations. HMSA (Hindu Mahasabha of America), VHPA (Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America), AHAD (American Hindus Against Defamation), USHA (US Hindu Alliance), Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), Hindu Students Council, Samskrit Bharati, Hindu Mandir Executive Conference (HMEC), Global Indians for Bharat Vikas (GIBV), OFBJP, Coalition Against Hinduphobia, Om Kriya Yog, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, GHHF, Gayatri Chetna Center, Bharat Sewashram Sangha, Infinity Foundation and many other groups started pitching in with ideas and resources to make these events successful.

Protests, pictures, and quotes below from various locations

Atlanta:

Courtesy: Gokul Kunnath President, US Hindu Alliance and Co Founder, Hindu Students Council.

Gokul Kunnath said “more than 135 members of the Hindu community from Metro Atlanta gathered at the HQ of CNN International in downtown Atlanta to protest against CNN. More than two dozen community organizations joined hands together to express their contempt for CNN's action and called for swift responses to the grievances of Hindus around the world. Large number of onlookers and pedestrians stopped by to understand the reason for the protest. One CNN employee even put the flyer that was distributed by the Hindus on her Facebook page, further establishing the fact that given an opportunity to air their free thoughts, even CNN's own employees would find the company's behavior totally bizarre. Atlanta Hindus were surprised at why a globally known news organization that once had the largest share of the news market would lower their journalistic standards to that of common tabloids found in supermarkets.”

Pictures:



New York:

Courtesy: Ganesh Ramakrishnan, Convener, Tristate Hindus

Ganesh Ramakrishnan stated "braving the cold weather at NYC opp to CNN office over 100+ Hindus assembled to peacefully protest again CNN's Believers show. It consisted of over 25+ organizations showing placards and distributing flyers to many curious People who stood took photos/videos, planning to write blogs and joined to shout slogans! From senior citizens to Hindu students from different walks of life gathered to showcase the lopsided Believers show! This is just a start!"

Pictures:





Houston:

Achalesh Amar, Campaign Director #HinduLivesMatter

Achalesh Amar said “Houston #HinduLivesMatter campaign event saw many Hindu organizations coming together for this most important issue faced by the Hindu community in USA. Despite inclement weather, over 50 persons gathered at Sugar Land Town square to condemn CNN for inciting #Hinduphobia.”

#HinduLivesMatter campaign activists asked for CNN to be shut down for fanning racism. They deplored how CNN turned from peddling “Fake news” to “Hate news”.

Pictures:



Washington, D.C. Area (Virginia):

Courtesy: Rajesh Gooty, Founder, India Cause.

Rajesh Gooty stated "In bone chilling cold, a spontaneous demonstration, spurred by conscientious Hindu Americans in Washington D.C. rallied together at a popular Hindu temple to express their strong disapproval of this highly offensive & deeply disturbing portrayal of over one billion practicing Hindus by #CNN on their global media network. Their energized clarion call demanded an unconditional apology & total withdrawal of this deeply racist, totally insensitive & horrendous show, inappropriately called "Believer", falling which further action plan will be chartered to advance the end game."

Pictures:



Bay Area Protest #1:

Courtesy: Somanjana Chatterjee, Bay Area Hindus

Somanjana Chatterjee stated that "It was incredible to see the support in the community when we talked about hate crimes towards Indian American community (and other communities) in the light of Kansas shooting and CNN airing misrepresented documentary of Hinduism (Believer) -- today's gathering gave me faith that we might have come in different boats to this country but we are all in it together now! "

Pictures:



Bay Area Protest #2:

Courtesy: Mani Keeran, Coalition Against Hinduphobia

Mani Keeran stated that “at a time when several incidents of hate crimes and racial slurs have been reported across the country against Indians and Hindus, it is sad that CNN has allowed Hinduphobia to be perpetuated through this show.”

Pictures:



Nigeria:

Courtesy: Kiran Parab, Vice President OFBJP Nigeria and Nigeria National President for International Anti-Terrorism Movement

Kiran Parab said that “with great pain and disgust we request the highest authorities in India to take action against the channel CNN and producer Reza Aslan for defaming Hindu way of life. We condemn their act and call upon Indian govt to register a case against them and bring them to book.”

Pictures:



Community Leaders and Intellectuals:

Popular Indian-American author Rajiv Malhotra and Hindu Students Council, an organization of Hindu students on college campuses, did a facebook live event on Thursday, March 9th to talk at length about the issue involved (ref: <https://www.facebook.com/RajivMalhotra.Official/videos/801624583324214/>).

Dr Vamsee Juluri, an Indian American professor of Media studies at the University of San Francisco called the show “reckless, racist and dangerously Anti-immigrant.” Pointing out several inaccuracies, mistranslations and mis-characterizations in the show he said “It is one saddening reality that despite having had immigrants in America for so many decades now, a major news channel like CNN still cannot do better than the old Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom sort of story when it comes to India.”

Ash Kalra, the first Hindu member of California Assembly who joined the protests at Milpitas said “The hate crimes against different communities including the Hindu-American community are based on ignorance and what CNN showed would only accentuate these crimes.” He said “the media had the responsibility of educating people about all communities and not spread ignorance.”

Ajay Shah, convener of AHAD said “Aslan has caused serious harm to Hindu community and put the safety of Hindu children in schools across the US in jeopardy. CNN has failed to hold itself to higher standards. Despite being alerted about the offensive content, CNN proceeded to air the show without consultation with practicing Hindu experts,”

Representative Tulsi Gabbard shared this on Facebook and twitter:

While good people across our country are working hard to increase mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions, I am very disturbed that CNN is using its power and influence to increase people’s misunderstanding and fear of Hinduism.

CNN on Sunday aired the first episode of a new series called “Believer” hosted by Reza Aslan. For this episode, Aslan apparently sought to find sensationalist and absurd ways to portray Hinduism. Aslan and CNN did not just throw a harsh light on a sect of wandering ascetics to create shocking visuals—as if touring a zoo—but repeated false stereotypes about caste, karma and reincarnation that Hindus have been combating tirelessly. CNN promotional materials and trailers that included a scene showing a group of Hindus under a caption, “CANNIBALS,” perpetuated bizarre and ugly impressions of Hindus and their religion.

CNN knows well that sensational, and even false reporting about religions only fosters ignorance that can lead to terrible consequences. Indeed, Hindus are still reeling after witnessing terrible hate crimes in the last few weeks alone. Our nation celebrates religious pluralism and diversity, and CNN must do more to foster greater respect for people of different religions.

It is my sincere hope that CNN and Aslan will engage with the Hindu community moving forward to resolve the pain and outrage that the “Believer” episode on Hinduism has engendered in the community.

<https://twitter.com/TulsiGabbard/status/839211072926134272>

Links to some snippets/videos from various events:

Houston: <https://www.facebook.com/pramod.buravalli/videos/10212931113691627/>

New York: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnB17zFdsjs>

Atlanta: <https://www.facebook.com/aryavishrut/videos/10155050874408255/>

Bay Area: <https://www.facebook.com/HinduYuvaUSA/videos/1475964152427334/>

The following protests are in pipeline– Boston, Dallas, Detroit, Phoenix, and Chicago in the USA; Calcutta, Delhi and Varanasi, India; London, UK; Paris France; Sydney, Australia; and Toronto, Canada.

Achalesh Amar

Campaign Director, #HinduLivesMatter

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Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

— MARK TWAIN

#HinduLivesMatter



**STOP YOUR
HATE CAMPAIGN
AGAINST HINDUS**

Hindu Holy City Varanasi is the most ancient continually functioning city in history. It is NOT "A City of Dead" !

