

**Letter of Protest Demanding Resignation and/or Removal of US
Ambassador Atul Keshap for Whitewashing Fascist RSS
Paramilitary With Official Public Meeting**

September 2021

Dear President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken:

US Ambassador Atul Keshap's 8 September 2021 meeting with the chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an Indian paramilitary, disqualifies him for continued service in any capacity as a diplomat within the US State Department.

The RSS is an armed, uniformed, all-male Hindu nationalist paramilitary which is implicated — including in reports from many US government entities — in acts of extreme violence against Indian religious minorities and others. Current RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, with whom Keshap met and staged a photo-op, is himself accused by RSS members who committed anti-Muslim bombings of directly sanctioning their actions. The RSS is ideologically committed to turning India into a “Hindu Rashtra [Nation]” in which non-Hindus are either subjugated to second-class citizenship or else eliminated altogether.

Furthermore, the RSS was founded in 1925 at the exact same time that the European fascist movements were developing in Italy and Germany. Its founders and ideologues pointed directly to the structure of Mussolini's fascist outfits, to the “race pride” of Hitler's Germany, and to the territorial expansionism of both fascist Italy and Germany as examples for the RSS to follow. One of its co-founders even traveled to Italy to meet Mussolini, subsequently describing the RSS as of an identical kind to the Italian fascist outfits.

Most notoriously, in 1939 (a year after Kristallnacht, the first Nazi pogrom of the Jews, and amidst the Nazi annexation of Austria and invasion of Poland), the RSS's longest-serving leader praised Hitler's “purging of the Jews” as a “good lesson for us... to learn and profit by.”

The Nazis primarily targeted Jewish people. In the case of the RSS, they target Christians and Muslims for elimination, seek to forcibly assimilate Buddhists and Sikhs, and variously discriminate against, harass and intimidate, and brutalize Dalits, Other Backward Classes, Adivasis, and women. In the case of Muslims and Christians, RSS founders and ideologues smeared them as members of “foreign races,” as an “internal threat,” or, in so many words, as “traitors.”

Since the RSS was founded, it has repeatedly put its xenophobic and genocidal ideology into practice with over a dozen large-scale pogroms against many different communities (especially Muslims and Christians), terrorist bombings, lynchings, assassinations, etc.

Today, the RSS — as the parent organization of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — holds vast influence over India. We understand why, considering all circumstances, the US may have an interest in initiating and/or maintaining contact with the RSS. However, the nature of Keshap’s meeting went far beyond simply establishing communication.

The nature of Keshap’s meeting with the RSS came across as a photo-op, it was public, and it platformed and promoted a violent, fascist (and many call it “terrorist”) organization which serves as the greatest enemy to religious freedom that Indian citizens face today. Keshap’s meeting appeared to legitimize, normalize, and whitewash the RSS.

In short, Ambassador Atul Keshap’s meeting with RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat seemed to place a stamp of approval on and act as an endorsement of the RSS — which is exactly how the action is now being interpreted by the paramilitary itself.

The timing of this de facto endorsement is particularly disturbing as the RSS-BJP regime has escalated its assault not only on human rights but on human rights promoters. Just one day after Keshap’s meeting, the regime raided the offices and home of prominent social activist Harsh Mander, who is widely known for his ongoing criticism of the RSS as well as RSS member and current Prime Minister Narendra Modi; in 2020, Amnesty International India was forced to shutter its operations after the RSS-backed government froze its accounts; and in 2018, the regime arrested and began framing conspiracy charges against 16 renowned academics and activists, one of whom, Father Stan Swamy, died in jail just two months ago. Keshap’s endorsement of the RSS serves to embolden its agenda to crush any and all dissent.

Furthermore, we are worried that Keshap’s meeting will also embolden the international network of RSS support groups, many of which operate on US soil. These especially include the Overseas Friends of the BJP (which only last year registered as a Foreign Agent after operating for nearly 30 years) and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (which, as the US wing of the RSS, maintains close ties with its mother organization, including conducting strategy and training sessions for members both in the US and in India). These groups and their sympathizers appear to bear some responsibility for the wave of intimidation, rape threats, and death threats issued to many participants in the recent US-hosted “Dismantling Global Hindutva” conference which took place just two days after Keshap’s meeting.

In August 2019, US Representative Ro Khanna (himself a Hindu of Indian origin), stated, “It is the duty of every American politician of Hindu faith to stand for pluralism, reject Hindutva [that is, Hindu nationalism], and speak for equal rights for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Christians.” Expanding upon Representative Khanna’s declaration, we believe it is the duty of the US government to disavow any associations with the RSS which might suggest

approval or appeasement, to stand up and speak out against religious nationalism anywhere it is found in the world, and to reject all alliances with fascistic organizations or governments.

Ambassador Keshap's deplorable meeting with the RSS unfortunately indicates that the US government is prioritizing geopolitical concerns and profits over principles or people. This cannot stand.

We, the undersigned:

1) Demand that President Joe Biden's administration, and particularly Secretary of State Antony Blinken, answer for Ambassador Keshap's meeting, explain its purpose, and transparently disclose its views about the RSS and that group's Hindu nationalist agenda.

2) Demand that Ambassador Keshap immediately resign or be removed from any and all postings within the US State Department.

3) Demand that President Biden's nominee for permanent Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, disclose his own views on the RSS and its agenda; additionally, we demand that Garcetti's views on the matter be scrutinized with the utmost intensity as his nomination is considered for approval by the US Senate.

Signed by:

- **Alliance to Save & Protect America From Infiltration by Religious Extremists**
- **Association of Indian Muslims of America**
- **Bhim Rao Ambedkar Sikh Foundation**
- **Coalition of Americans for Pluralism in India**
- **Indian American Muslim Council**
- **Justice For All**
- **North American Indian Muslim Association**
- **No Separate Justice**
- **Organization for Minorities of India**
- **Sikh Information Centre**