



May 11, 2020

Dear Mayor Carter and City Council Members of Saint Paul:

This letter follows our earlier letter to you dated May 4th, 2020 regarding Resolution 20-712.

I am writing on behalf of the India Association of Minnesota (IAM), the representative organization for Asian Indians in Minnesota since 1973. We are a non-profit organization connecting Asian Indians in Minnesota for over 47 years. There are over 50,000 Asian Indians living in Minnesota who call Minnesota their home. Large numbers of our community live in the city of Saint Paul.

We strongly affirm the values and respect for the rule of law and the freedom of religion, and to provide protection for minority, religious, indigenous and other vulnerable groups from violent acts on people and property, and to protect and uphold the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitutions of the United States and India, which are the two largest democracies in the world.

We appreciate the Saint Paul City Council postponing the adoption of the resolution for two weeks to May 20th and in doing so also acknowledging the concerns of the Asian Indian community and others. Since that time, there are over 2000 comments posted on the public comments page of the Council indicating the strong emotions this resolution has raised in the local community. This resolution comes at a time when the Asian Indian community and the rest of Minnesota are actively dealing with a huge health and economic crisis, that is also causing an increase in emotional stress.

During the last few days, we hosted community conversations with a wide range of community organizations to receive their insights and recommendations in relation to this Resolution 20-712 (see points 1-11 following these recommendations).

Based on community input from our listening sessions, we affirm and recommend the following:

- **The India Association of Minnesota strongly condemns all acts of harm and persecution, by government or private individuals and organizations against religious and other minority groups in the United States, India and other countries of the world and calls upon governments, peoples and organizations to protect persecuted religious and other minority groups from harm and violence.**
- **Community members strongly recommend that the current resolution as written be tabled because of the reasons 1-11 mentioned below relating to the tone, context and factual errors.**
- **We suggest that the City Council could explore an alternative resolution, with the Asian Indian community's input, that would support the protection of religious and other minorities all over the world, including the United States, India and other South Asian countries, from acts of violence and harm and to provide these persecuted groups equal access to resources and opportunities.**
- **We also request that the City Council consider the input from the Asian Indian community of Minnesota on matters that impact this community both in Saint Paul and in India.**



We share below a summary of the feedback we received:

1. Community members were surprised, hurt and troubled by the Saint Paul City Council's proposed resolution 20-712 that portrays an unfair picture of India and Asian Indians and is very divisive in tone and substance. An average person reading the resolution would come to a very negative conclusion about India and Hinduism, which is very unfortunate, unfair and uncalled for.
2. The content of the resolution contains many inaccuracies about the laws and their implementation.
3. It is unfortunate that the Asian Indian community in Minnesota was not consulted before the resolution was finalized.
4. This negative tone of the resolution will do much harm and increase tensions within the Asian community and negate the many years of effort that Asian Indian organizations like the India Association of Minnesota have put into building community harmony as we celebrate all communities in our work and actions and reflected in our major events – *Connect India*, *IndiaFest*, *Connect Asia* and in the *Festival of Nations*. It will also promote stereotypes about Indian Americans in the minds of other Minnesotans.
5. Community members affirmed that India has a strong tradition of celebrating all religions and India is the birthplace of major religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Christian and Jewish communities also have ancient roots in India. The Muslim community has deep roots in India and has a diverse cultural presence in many communities from Kerala in the south to Kashmir in the north of India and is also reflected in Indian food, music, film, dance and literature. India has integrated the rich cultural heritage of Muslim and other religious traditions into the beautiful cultural mosaic of India. All these are just a few examples of the high level of religious diversity and tolerance practiced in India over centuries. Religious tolerance and secularism are embedded in the ethos of Indians. India has also provided shelter to Tibetan Buddhists including the Dalai Lama in 1958.
6. Community members affirmed the strong protections for minorities enshrined in the Constitution of India and the importance of these protections for minority groups in India.
7. The tone, content and implication of the resolution so written also unfairly paints a negative identity of the next generation of Asian Indians in Minnesota, many of whom work actively for social justice and the protection of the rights of minorities in India, the United States and all over the world.
8. Asian Indian physicians and health care workers of all faiths, including Hindus and Muslims, are on the front line of the Covid-19 crisis and on the frontiers of medical innovations to stem the harmful impacts of this crisis. Asian Indian community organizations in collaboration with the India Association of Minnesota have launched the Covid 19-Emergency Relief Fund with \$100,000 to provide food and PPE supplies to the Minnesotans in need.
9. It also singles out India for a very negative depiction while remaining silent on human rights violations of religious minorities in neighboring South Asian countries.



10. Recent reports document the growing persecution of religious minorities in various countries around the world. For example, the 2020 [Annual Report](#) of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) provides specific references to growing persecution of religious minorities, especially those countries named as [Tier 1](#) and [Tier 2](#) countries, which include a number of South Asian countries and involving different religious groups.

11. The Pew Research 10th [Annual Report](#) of Religious Restrictions 2019 corroborates data on the 2020 USCIRF report on growing discrimination against religious minority groups in 187 countries in the world including the United States, by [governments](#) and by [individuals and organizations](#).

Thank you for listening. We appreciate the many ways the City of Saint Paul has partnered with the India Association of Minnesota and offer these suggestions in the spirit of that partnership.

Sincerely

Sreeni Checka | President | India Association of Minnesota
314 518 6930 | sreeni.checka@iamn.org