

India's response at UPR reflects 'stance of denial': Activists

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A group of activists today alleged that India's response at the UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) meet reflected a "stance of denial" on the human rights situation in the country.

"So many human rights issues are affecting the country, including acts of vigilantism, but we chose not to acknowledge them at the UN forum. Instead, our response there was evasive, defensive and ill-prepared," former Special Rapporteur to the UN Miloon Kothari said.

Kothari and three other rights activists addressed a press conference here, a day after the government received a dossier of about 250 recommendations that 112 countries had made at the 27th session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group in Geneva on May 4.

Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi, who led the Indian delegation at the UN Human Rights Council, had said that India makes no distinction between caste, creed, colour or religion of a citizen.

"India is a secular state with no state religion," he had said, adding that the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to every individual.

Kothari said, a "wave of recommendations" has been received from these countries and the "Indian government has put all the recommendations on pending".

"The recommendations are wide-ranging, from child labour to women rights and human trafficking and religious and minority rights, including on religious intolerance, and Haiti even raised the issue of attacks on African nationals," Co- Director of Haq - Centre for Child Rights, Enakshi Ganguly Thukral said.

"At home, we are witnessing cases of lynching of members of a minority community due to consumption of beef, and at the UN forum we said, 'India is a secular state with no state religion'. We did not acknowledge the realities, and it reflected a stance of denial," she alleged.

Haiti in its recommendations has urged India to "establish a national action plan in combating hate crimes, racism and negative stereotypes against people of African descent inside its territory, including appropriate programmes of public awareness that will address the problem of racism and Afro-phobia, in full consultation with those particularly affected".

Kothari said the idea of UPR is not "naming and shaming a country" but to "engage more constructively".

"We are part of the UN and so we report to it the status of human rights. If instead of evading the realities, we had acknowledged them and asserted that the country would address them, it would have sent a very positive message to the international community," he said.

The UPR is a unique process which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. India's first and second UPR reviews took place in April 2008 and May 2012 respectively. On May 4, the third review took place.

The countries which have made recommendations to India include Germany, Ireland, Rwanda, China, Japan and Malaysia.

Many countries have urged India to ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture).