

KILLING THE LICENCE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON NGOS AND FUNDING

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

If the past few years of enhanced measures against non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in India had not put enough of a squeeze on them, then the Ministry of Home Affairs's long-drawn-out process of scrutinising their foreign-funding licences by year-end is sure to do so. Close on the heels of the news that the [Missionaries of Charity group had been denied a renewal](#) of its licence under the [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Act, 2010 \(amended in 2020\)](#), comes the revelation that more than four-fifths of [the applications of the 22,000-plus NGOs that have sought renewal have yet to be scrutinised](#). Unless the Government extends [the deadline](#) by midnight, all of them stand to lose their ability to access international funding in the new year. As experts have explained, the NGOs have to prove not only that the source of funding and their usage of the funds is appropriate but also establish that their work does not qualify as harmful to “public interest” or “national security” — ambiguous terms that are left to MHA officials to define. So, as many as 2,000 NGOs under scrutiny may be denied a renewal of their FCRA licence as the Missionaries of Charity and its roughly 200 homes around the country have been in this round.

Contrary to the Government's defence that it is only following [accounting and audit procedures](#), it seems clear that organisations that have particularly faced the Modi government's ire are those that work in specific “sensitive areas”: pollution and climate change issues, human rights, child labour and human slavery, health and religious NGOs, particularly [Christian and Islamic charities](#). Prominent names among nearly 20,000 NGOs to have lost their foreign-funding licences since 2014 include [Amnesty International](#), [Greenpeace India](#), [People's Watch](#), [European Climate Foundation](#), [Compassion International](#) and the Gates Foundation-backed [Public Health Foundation of India](#). If the Government has ample evidence to prove that Indians are better off without the work of these internationally renowned organisations, then it has yet to show it. It is time the Government gives a more transparent account of its actions against NGOs, which at present appear to mirror those in China and Russia which have used their NGO laws to shut down dissent and criticism. The actions in India over “foreign hand” concerns seem more hypocritical given the relative ease with which political parties are able to access foreign funds for their campaigns through electoral bonds, under the same FCRA that seeks to restrict funds to NGOs. At a time when India is facing the crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a long-term economic crisis, the Government's moves that have resulted in an estimated 30% drop in international non-profit contributions, only hurt the poorest and most vulnerable recipients of philanthropic efforts, particularly those by NGOs working in areas where government aid fails to reach.

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