

NY demonstration protests against yellow Afghan Hindu clothing

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NEW YORK (June 1) - NEW YORK - Lined up along the Holocaust Memorial Wall across from the United Nations headquarters, Jewish, Christian, and Hindu leaders wore yellow stickers and spoke out in solidarity with Afghan Hindus, who are being forced by the nation's ruling Taliban movement to wear saffron-colored garments.

"Humankind cannot acquiesce to inhumanity," said Michael Miller, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York which organized the event. "Whenever and wherever intolerance, bigotry or hate appears, the response must be immediate," he said.

Since the Taliban came to power in 1996, the radical Islamic movement has banned education for girls, beaten men for trimming their beards, and destroyed ancient Buddhist statues. The country's Hindu minority, which has lived in the area for over a millennia and once numbered in the tens of thousands, is about 1,500 strong today.

When the news of the Taliban's dress code for non-Muslims broke last week, Jewish and Israeli leaders condemned the ruling, declaring it reminiscent of the Nazi era and the Holocaust.

"It is critical to draw attention to the decree," said Hindu Temple Society of North America president Uma Mysorekar, who added, "Any time you single out a person to be instantly recognized as a member of a minority group, you're setting that person up for persecution." She noted that her group has already received reports of attacks on Hindus who failed to comply with the Taliban ruling.

A resolution condemning the Taliban and urging Pakistan - one of the few countries that has diplomatic relations with Afghanistan - to pressure the Taliban into rescinding the edict is gaining momentum in Congress, said Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), the resolution's sponsor. In addition, New York's Sen. Charles Schumer vowed to do "everything in our power" to protect Afghanistan's Hindus.

"We need to learn from the past. The visible marking of people was the beginning of the Holocaust," said Germany's deputy representative to the UN Hanns Heinrich Schumacher.