SAVERA
UNITED AGAINST SUPREMACY

ADVISORY

Hindu supremacist groups are deceiving interfaith organizations

What our colleagues should know

October 26, 2026

WHY WE ARE ISSUING THIS ADVISORY

On 29 August 2026, Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the largest far-right organization in the world, spoke at Madison Square Garden at an event titled "Universal Oneness." The event's innocuous title signaled the RSS's broader goal: whitewashing its reputation for violence and bigotry.

More concerningly, a number of interfaith leaders were misled into attending the event, as well as a morning gathering that preceded it. It is in response to this deception, and to protect the sanctity of what the interfaith community has spent decades building, that we, as members of that community, issue this advisory.

We write to draw our colleagues' attention to the strategies and deceptions behind this effort, and to the documented history of the RSS as a supremacist, bigoted, and authoritarian network cynically instrumentalizing our field's legacy of pluralism and dialogue to whitewash their violent and bigoted image. This advisory sets out what happened, who the RSS is, how to recognize their tactics, and what colleagues can do.

To learn more about the RSS and its U.S. affiliates, please see our reports at https://wearesavera.org/resources/reports.

WHAT HAPPENED

The events of that weekend bear repeating.

- Dozens of interfaith leaders were invited to two events, one in the morning at the Pierre Hotel, and a second in the afternoon at Madison Square Garden. The invitations came neither from the RSS nor its U.S. chapter the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the AHEAD Forum (the registered organizer of Bhagwat's visit), nor any Hindu entity, but from innocuous-sounding organizations called the "World Council of Religious Leaders" and the "Center for Responsible Leadership."

- The interfaith leaders were never told that Mohan Bhagwat would be attending, or of the exact relationship between the morning event—titled "One World, One Humanity"—and the Madison Square Garden event.
- Instead, the invitations left blank the "Guest of Honour" listed on the program, and repeatedly urged invitees to wear their "traditional attire"—all pointing to the fact that the RSS was primarily out for a photo-op to confer interfaith legitimacy on itself without confronting its own record against pluralism.
- The leaders were also asked to submit "commitments" for the gathering. Unbeknownst to them, these were compiled and read out by Bhagwat on stage, and subsequently published on Hindutva platforms such as *Organiser*, the RSS's official mouthpiece. Their consent was not sought for any of these uses.

Colleagues who attended did so in good faith. Responsibility for the deception lies with those who designed it.

WHO THE RSS IS

The RSS's ideology is called Hindutva ("Hindu-ness"). Hindutva is not Hinduism. It is a political ideology of Hindu supremacy that seeks to remake India as a Hindu nation, in which Muslims, Christians and other minorities are cast as outsiders. Many Hindus, in India and in the United States, reject it, and Hindus are among its most courageous critics. This advisory concerns an organization and its political project—not a faith, and not our Hindu neighbors and colleagues.

Our colleagues in the interfaith community need to learn about the reality of the RSS as a century-old Hindu nationalist organization, and the apex of the Sangh Parivar ("family of organizations"), the largest far-right network in the world. That network includes India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has affiliates abroad, including in the United States. Its history includes its early leaders' open admiration for Hitler and Mussolini, and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a one-time RSS member.

The organization is behind the systematic and brutal repression of religious minorities in India, including what observers have called pogroms and ethnic cleansing, primarily targeting Muslims and Christians. Its overseas wings have sponsored the organized dissemination of hate speech, targeted real interfaith coalitions, and lobbied to protect discriminatory practices, most notably against protections against caste-based discrimination in the United States. Now, they have sought to cheapen the basic tenets of our work.

A FAMILIAR PLAYBOOK

This is an old strategy of the Hindu far-right, which has long sought to curtail the civil rights of other communities in the language of protecting Hindus, and to spread religious bigotry in the language of religious freedom and pluralism. It may have earned the RSS a short-term success. But it also revealed a deeper truth about groups like the Hindu far-right, for whom interfaith legitimacy is a mere commodity to be appropriated.

The RSS and its affiliates—from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (the U.S. branch of the RSS's religious wing), to the Hindu American Foundation, to the next innocuous front like the "World Council of Religious Leaders"—can put on as many masks as they like, mount all the deceptions their funding can sponsor, and float all the front organizations they desire. But because they have no real interest in the fundamental tenets of pluralism and interfaith work, they miss a basic truth: **pluralism is not a word you say, but a record you build.**

An organization cannot claim the mantle of universal brotherhood while its members have been accused of organizing pogroms, while its American wings fan hate speech, and while its affiliates lead the destruction of churches and waves of anti-Muslim violence across India.

WHAT AUTHENTIC INTERFAITH WORK REQUIRES

Interfaith work requires years of relationship-building and shared action across communities that do not always agree on everything, but work to better understand, and show up for, one another. That is a truer expression of pluralism than anything spoken from the stage at Madison Square Garden.

Authentic interfaith engagement requires informed consent. It requires honesty about who is organizing an event, whom participants are being asked to appear alongside, and how their names, images, words and institutional affiliations will be used. Our work is sacred, and the cynical use of our name, message, and legacy by these bad-faith actors threatens its core principles.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

The tactics used in New York are not new. Colleagues should be cautious when an invitation:

- comes from an organization you have never heard of, with a generic name and little public history;
- does not name the host, sponsors or funders, or explain how linked events relate to one another;
- leaves a featured speaker or "Guest of Honour" unnamed;
- emphasizes visual display—"traditional attire," clergy in robes, group photographs—over substantive dialogue;
- asks for written statements, pledges or "commitments" in advance, without saying how they will be used.

None of these alone is proof of bad faith, but taken together, they form a pattern.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

Before accepting an invitation

- Ask, in writing, who is organizing, sponsoring and funding the event, and who else will speak or appear.

- Ask how your name, image, words and institutional affiliation will be used, and state that nothing is to be published without your consent.
- Do not submit statements or "commitments" without knowing where, and by whom, they will be read or published.
- If the answers are vague or evasive, decline. When in doubt about groups that you suspect may be linked to the Hindu supremacist movement, contact us at wearesavera@gmail.com.

If you attended the August events

- You may ask *Organiser* and any other outlet that published your name, image or words to remove them, and consider a brief public note that you were not informed of Bhagwat's role.

Going forward

- Share this advisory with your boards, congregations and interfaith networks.

OUR POSITION

Our message is clear: we will judge the RSS and its affiliates on what they do, not what they say. And by that measure, the decision is an easy one. We will give them no stage or audience for the foreseeable future, and we urge our colleagues to do the same.

If you would like further information, please email us at wearesavera@gmail.com.

SINATORIES

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