

To the National Association of Theater Owners of America,

We are a diverse coalition of interfaith, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Dalit (caste oppressed South Asians) groups writing to urge you to inform your member organizations about the Islamophobic Bollywood film “The Kerala Story”, which is already screening in the U.S. Though the movie presents itself as factual, it in fact advances a dangerous ideology which has already been used to promote hatred and violence against Muslims in India. The film has already been banned in states throughout [India](#) and the [British Board of Film Classification \(BBFC\)](#) has already added disclaimers to “The Kerala Story,” highlighting Islamophobic content, saying, “The film presents a partial and unbalanced view of Islam which focuses on radical Islamist characters and motivations to the exclusion of more moderate and mainstream forms of the faith.” Already, [some UK cinemas](#) are refusing to screen the film.

As reported by [the BBC](#), “The Kerala Story” is based on the false claim that 32,000 Hindu and Christian women had been lured by seemingly ordinary Muslim men into joining ISIS. [This claim has been thoroughly debunked by government data](#) from both the US and India: there were only 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with ISIS as of November 2020 out of a total Indian population of 1.4 billion people.

The film has a clear agenda: to disseminate the “Love Jihad” conspiracy theory, which according to [Time Magazine](#) is a Hindu far-right lie that Muslim men entrap Hindu women through seduction and then convert them to Islam. Despite being thoroughly debunked by the Indian government itself, the conspiracy theory has directly led to mob attacks on Muslim men across India, including public beatings for speaking to Hindu coworkers or friends, and a graphic case where a young [Muslim man was beheaded for having an affair with a Hindu](#) woman.

[According to](#) Kerala state lawmaker Binoy Viswam, “[The] people of Kerala in general have opposed this politically motivated attempt to slander the state in a united voice. The so-called ‘Love Jihad’ is a baseless Islamophobic conspiracy theory aimed at polarization. The Union Home Ministry... has informed the Parliament that no cases of ‘love jihad’ have been reported.”

He added, “The narrative being propelled by ‘The Kerala Story’ is thus clearly based on lies and twisting facts and aims at fueling hatred. It is dangerously harmful for communal harmony in Kerala in particular and the country in general.”

There is ample evidence to suggest that “The Kerala Story” is a propaganda tool used by India’s Hindu far-right government to polarize communities, demonize Muslims, and seize the Hindu vote. In Uttar Pradesh state, which is known as a hotbed of anti-minority violence, Hindu supremacist politicians [have championed the film](#) and demanded that draconian laws be enacted to police relationships between Muslims and Hindus. Just days ago, as part of an election campaign in Karnataka state, Prime Minister Narendra Modi [claimed the film exposed “terrorism” and an “anti-India plot.”](#) As reported in [The Economist](#), Modi also championed the Islamophobic film “The Kashmir Files”, which directly inspired numerous acts of anti-muslim violence among theater goers.

Audience members watching the film have been recorded [on video](#) saying it made them afraid of, or made them want to inflict violence against Muslims. In Indian states like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the governments have banned or halted screenings of “The Kerala Story”, citing fears of increased hate crimes and other threats to public safety.

Hindu far-right supporters of anti-Muslim violence in India — including [groups directly connected to violent extremist](#) groups — also exist in the American diaspora, and they shouldn’t be given fuel for for bigoted campaign to disrupt peace and pluralism here in the US.

While we respect the right to freedom of speech, there is absolutely no need to abet the filmmakers of this deceptive and dangerous film in their global campaign to promote anti-Muslim hatred and violence. A foreign propaganda movie that blatantly champions anti-Semitism or anti-blackness would be rightly subjected to scrutiny; we urge you to maintain the same standards for this anti-Muslim film.

Sincerely,

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

The Indian American Muslim Council

Hindus for Human Rights

Ambedkar King Study Circle

International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR)