

4915

Washington, June 30. - A U.S. missionary yesterday defended Prime Minister Gandhi's regime before a U.S. Congress inquiry into the issue of Human Rights in India. The witness sitting next to him, a prominent Indian jurist, bitterly condemned Mrs. Gandhi and her government.

The hearing Chairman, Congressman Donald M. Fraser of Minnesota, one of the leading liberals of the U.S. Democratic party, volunteered his own assessment at the end of three days of hearings before his House of Representatives subcommittee on International Organizations:

"The U.N. has a series of covenants on Human Rights and I guess what I believe would be more destructive than anything else would be for national boundaries to become no one else's concern. There has to be a common sense of decency and morality in this world if it is going to work ... The defence of India's Emergency decrees has the familiar ring of the classic authoritarianism and martial law that we've seen in Chile, South Korea and the Phillipines."

Congressman Fraser acknowledged that he differed completely with the testimony of Charles Reynolds, International Secretary of the Ludhiana Christian Medical College who declared that had India not cracked down on those "inciting people to disorder", India, today, would be another Northern Ireland (Reynolds' birthplace), another Lebanon.

The missionary educator went on to charge that accounts of suppression of Human Rights in today's India are highly distorted. And he quoted from a recent New York luncheon conversation with India's Deputy Minister of Information, to the effect that "press censorship no longer exists: there is self-discipline".

When Reynolds defended his source as playing "a very vital role" in the press situation, Congressman Fraser interposed: "I assume he must have a vital role since he controls the press". Then the Congressman asked the missionary whether he thought the Indian press would be allowed to report the testimony of yesterday's other witness, Ram Jethmalani, Chairman of the Indian Bar Council for the past six years, a man who fled Bombay for U.S. exile in April just as he was about to be arrested without, he said, any formal charges pressed against him. Reynolds replied that Jethmalani's testimony "may not be reported in the Indian press because it may be considered inflammatory".

In his testimony yesterday, Jethmalani said Prime Minister Gandhi had imposed a personal dictatorship with the objective of building up a family dynasty. "It appears to me that the objective of this 'Emergency' is merely to crush the Opposition", he declared.

Jethmalani, who also is an advocate before India's Supreme Court, said he had to make a decision after India's Supreme Court ruling went against him

last April - whether to remain in his homeland and "work from within" or leave India and "work from without". He continued: "It may sound a bit cowardly, but I have made the choice and I am testifying before you today. My passport may be lifted tomorrow".

To that, Congressman Fraser interjected: "If the result of your testimony today should be the loss of your passport, members of the U.S. Congress would like to know about it".

The hearing Chairman also pressed the Ludhiana Christian Medical College representative on why, if the objective of the Emergency decree was to further India's economic progress, was it deemed necessary to jail members of India's Parliament?

Reynolds explained: "If Members of Parliament were among those inciting people to discredit a governmental institution, then it was necessary".

Among the faithful observers at all three of the hearings on the Human Rights situation in India was the South Asian expert of the Soviet Embassy here. He noted aloud yesterday that the two witnesses in the series who defended Prime Minister Gandhi were both American missionaries, and that the witnesses most critical of her were Indians.

Also in the congressional hearing room audience were representatives of the State Department, the Indian Embassy and Amnesty International. At the first hearing day, last week, the press was represented by the Washington Post, the U.S. Government's Voice of America, the Hindustan Times, the Indian Express and The Statesman. At yesterday's final hearing, The Statesman was the lone representative at the Press table.

---