

Muslims in India are facing an unparalleled attack on their citizenship rights under the Hindu Nationalist government of Narendra Modi. The Citizenship Act could drive many of the country's 200 million Muslim into statelessness. The law grants special privileges to non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh - making it easier for them acquire Indian citizenship.

Ostensibly, this is to protect religious minorities escaping persecution, but no such concessions are offered to Muslim refugees. The law is deafeningly silent on the plight Rohingya Muslims fleeing genocide in Myanmar and Sri Lankan Tamils who make up India's largest refugee population.

In 1583, while Europe was tearing itself apart in religious wars, Elizabeth I sent a message to the Mughal Emperor of India Akbar. In it she praised his humanity - at the time England was a small pariah state, so the letter has more than a hint of flattery. Among his reforms, Akbar brought together scholars from across continent into a series of interfaith discussions and promoted mutual understanding and reconciliation. It was later European intervention, and specifically British rule, that brought about a system where Indians were categorised, classified and divided - most destructively into Hindu and Muslim.

The Citizenship Act is the latest attack on the rights of Muslims by a right-wing Hindu nationalist government that thrives on sectarian strife. The government plans to compile a National Register of Citizens for which people will be required to provide documentary proof that they are Indian. Those who lack documents (disproportionately Muslims) face deportation or imprisonment in giant purpose-built detention camps. In the state of Assam, where the policy has been trialled, some 2 million people could face incarceration.

In response, Greens from across Europe took up the challenge against one of the most powerful economies in the world. I chaired a meeting of cross party MEPs to work on a motion for a resolution that all the major groups in the European Parliament could agree on. It was an example of the European Parliament at its best. I'm proud of my colleagues for standing in solidarity with hundreds of thousands of Indian activists who've been fighting this cruel and authoritarian policy. However, the battle is not yet won - the European People's Party (the Centre-Right group in the Parliament), and some of the Social Democrats voted to postpone the vote and kick the issue into the long grass. In effect they have put trade above human rights, a damning indictment of what Europe has not learned from its history.

The Indian lobby in Brussels is also active, applying pressure and threatening to pull out of an EU-India summit in protest at the European Parliament's criticisms. With right-wing populists and authoritarians in the ascendency across the world, the European Union must take a stand. It's the duty of the international community to challenge the likes of Trump, Bolsonaro and Modi and to champion the rights of civil society who resist them. The international community must not turn a blind eye to such political oppression, no matter how powerful the perpetrator. If European states fail to do so, it will be a grievous shirking of responsibility - especially in light of the continents' colonial past.