

Press release

European Parliament adopts historic resolution on Dalits

A strongly worded resolution on caste discrimination in India was debated and adopted today by the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The Parliament condemned the high number of atrocities committed against Dalits in India and the Indian government's insufficient action on the issue of caste discrimination.

Copenhagen (IDSN), 13 December 2012 -- The European Parliament (EP) today sent a strong message of solidarity to millions of victims of caste discrimination in India and urged the country's authorities to live up to their pledges to end this serious human rights problem and ensure protection of Dalits and other vulnerable groups.

While acknowledging that significant work had already been done to eradicate caste discrimination in India, the EP expressed its deep concern over the continued human rights violations against Dalits; condemned the high number of atrocities committed against them; and deplored the non-intervention by state actors such as the police in acts of communal violence against Dalits.

Expressing its deep concern about the inhuman practice of manual scavenging, the EP urged the Government of India to amend and enforce the law banning this practice.

The EP also called upon EU institutions to develop a specific policy on the issue and endorse a UN framework to eliminate caste discrimination – the so-called draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

“The message sent today by the European Parliament to the Government of India is a very clear one. It is time to get your act together and put an end to caste discrimination. It is also time for the EU to adopt a policy on caste discrimination and recognise it as a global human rights issue,” IDSN coordinator Rikke Nöhrind said following the historic resolution.

The resolution, which was debated this afternoon, was adopted unanimously by the EP. In the debate, many members of parliament said that the Indian government does not take its human rights responsibilities seriously, and that authorities must do much more to enforce the laws that have been enacted to protect Dalit rights. Mrs. Lochbiehler, Chair of the EP Sub-Committee on Human Rights, said:

“Dalits are about a quarter of India's population. India has legislated on certain levels, but with little success.” She further stated that the Indian authorities should intervene and come up with new legislation, and called for EU support to activists resisting “the people who profit from this modern form of slavery”.

Mr. Van Dalen expressed concerns that thousands of Dalits are being tortured by the police, and that those who force Dalits into prostitution are not being prosecuted. “We as the EU can make an important contribution to change that. India has to bring in reforms in the judiciary and social services. Let us introduce that as a precondition when the EU is negotiating with India on a new trade agreement”, he said.

Several references were made to recent cases of acts of violence against Dalits, such as in Haryana, where Dalit girls and women have recently been the victims of a number of gang rapes, or Tamil Nadu, where communal violence against Dalit villages has made 1,500 people homeless.

Referring to these cases, Mr. Repo regretted that Dalits have not seen their situation improved, and that “the violent actions have shown how little has been done”. The resolution states that the EP remains “alarmed” by such cases and by “other reported and unreported atrocities against Dalits.”

The EP has instructed its President to forward the resolution to India’s Prime Minister, EU institutions and member states, and the UN Secretary General, among others.

The resolution is also a strong call to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to take immediate action.

Download the [Joint Motion for the EP Resolution on caste discrimination in India \(\(2012/2909\(RSP\)\) here >>](#)

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Interviews:

- Ms. Rikke Nöhrlind, IDSN’s Coordinator, tel. +45 2970 0630.
- Ms. Asha Kowtal, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India: + 91 9560100442 (for info on the human rights situation of Dalits, especially Dalit women, and the [Haryana rape cases](#) in India)
- Mr. Henri Tiphagne, People’s Watch, India: + 91 9894025859 (for info on the general human rights situation in India, amendment of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes Act, and the [Dharmapuri case](#))

Photos:

- For high quality photos of Dalits in India, please contact IDSN on +45 60433432 or info@idsn.org – available for licensing from the award winning photographer [Jakob Carlsen](#). See [examples here >>](#)

Background on caste discrimination:

Caste discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as work and descent. This form of discrimination, which is associated with the notion of impurity and pollution, involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is estimated that 260 million people are affected by caste discrimination worldwide. Those who are beneath the entire caste system – and are therefore literally ‘outcaste’ and ‘untouchable’ – call themselves ‘Dalits’.

There are officially 167 million Dalits in India according to 2001 government figures. NGO and expert estimates however, say the figure is closer to 200 million. The majority of Dalits in India are impoverished and excluded, abused, denied justice, exploited, and considered ‘untouchable’.

Several UN bodies have expressed grave concern about caste discrimination, and have reaffirmed that it is prohibited by international human rights law, which should be addressed comprehensively through existing human rights mechanisms. [See compilation >>](#) & [UN Principles and Guidelines on caste discrimination >>](#)

European Parliament and caste discrimination:

The European Parliament has on several occasions expressed concern about the human rights violations against the Dalits of South Asia. The Urgency Resolution, adopted on 13 Dec, follows up on the 2007 Resolution B6-0021/2007 on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India. In 2011, a hearing on caste discrimination in South Asia was organised jointly by the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Development Committee, and the Delegations on relations with India and South Asia respectively.

- [Briefing paper on caste discrimination and the European Union >>](#)
- [Summary of main EU initiatives on caste-based discrimination >>](#)

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) is a network that advocates for Dalit human rights and to raises awareness of the need for action to end caste discrimination nationally and internationally. The network includes national platforms and associates in caste-affected countries, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe, and international human rights groups, development agencies, and research associates. IDSN’s associates include Human Rights Watch, Minority Rights Group International, Anti-Slavery International, Asian Human Rights Commission, IMADR, Forum-Asia, LWF and WCC. www.idsn.org