

UN increasingly concerned about caste

Press Release (May 31, 2012). Following yesterday's release of the reports on the UN human rights reviews of India and the UK, it is evident that UN member states are increasingly concerned about caste discrimination, affecting an estimated 260 million people worldwide.

For the first time ever, a recommendation on outlawing caste discrimination in the UK was raised in the Human Rights Council Working Group at the UK review, while ten recommendations directly relating to caste were made at the review of India, compared to only two in 2008. An additional seven states raised caste as part of their observations, thus leaving the number of states that addressed the issue of caste in the India review at a total of 14.

"Caste discrimination has far from been eradicated in neither the 'world's biggest democracy' nor in the diaspora population living in the UK," said Rikke Nöhrind, Coordinator of the International Dalit Solidarity Network.

"The fact that states are expressing increasing concern over caste and the situation of Dalits in UN reviews, reflects that the situation on the ground in caste-affected countries is not showing significant signs of improvement, and that access to basic human rights and justice continues to be severely impaired for hundreds of millions of citizens," said Carl Soderbergh, Director of Policy and Communications at Minority Rights Group International.

Despite the many concerns expressed on this issue, the UK and Indian Government neglected to respond adequately in the interactive dialogue to the recommendations of concerned UN Member States and postponed comment on the recommendations until the formal adoption in the Human Rights Council session in September.

Caste-related recommendations were made in the two reviews by a cross-regional group of states, including Thailand, Japan, Ghana, Czech Republic, Nicaragua, Germany, Norway, USA, and the Holy See. In addition, Chile, Canada, Luxembourg, Hungary, Denmark, and Slovenia asked questions or made observations related to caste in the India review.

Accepting the recommendations and setting up time-bound plans for their implementation would be a first, pertinent step by the Government of India in addressing the biggest and most pervasive human rights issue in the country.

Not only member states, but also UN human rights treaty bodies and Special Procedures have over the last decade raised their concerns on the continued and deeply vested discriminatory practices and gross human rights violations against Dalits in India.

Human rights defenders are now eagerly anticipating a renewed commitment and constructive developments in the policies and practices of both countries in relation to caste, and will continue to monitor developments closely.

“In a country that has a tradition of discrimination, we demand that India has clear anti-discrimination campaigns and laws, and that these laws are actively implemented to make a difference on the ground,” said Paul Divakar of the National Campaign on Human Rights (NCDHR) at a side-event following the review.

“The UPR is one step towards access to justice in India, but a strong campaign is needed to address the discriminatory mindsets that continue to permeate our culture,” said Asha Kowtal of NCDHR. Ms. Kowtal also expressed concerns that the specific problems related to Dalit women due to the intersectionality of gender and caste discrimination were not properly addressed.

We urge the two governments to accept all the recommendations made, and to work constructively with civil society in the next four-year UPR cycle to ensure their implementation and follow-up at the national level.

Following the UPR reviews, NCDHR and the Dalit Solidarity Network – UK each issued press releases with their reactions to the immediate outcome. IDSN is also compiling documents analyzing the outcome of both reviews, including all the specific recommendations on each country.

This press release is issued jointly by: International Dalit Solidarity Network ([IDSN](#)), Minority Rights Group International ([MRG](#)), International Movement Against all forms of Racism and Discrimination ([IMADR](#)), National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights – India ([NCDHR](#)) and the Dalit Solidarity Network – UK ([DSN-UK](#))

More information:

[Press Release from NCDHR with immediate reactions to the India UPR outcome >>](#)

[Press Release from DSN-UK with immediate reactions to the UK UPR outcome >>](#)

[Article on the outcome of the UPR of India >>](#)

[Article on the outcome of the UPR of the UK >>](#)

[UPR India 2012: Briefing note with key recommendations and question - Caste discrimination in India >>](#)

[UPR India submission - Coalition report by National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights >>](#)

[UPR UK 2012: Briefing note with key recommendations and question >>](#)

[DSN-UK and IDSN joint UPR submission on caste-based discrimination in the UK >>](#)

[Follow the twitter news about the UPRs on @idsnupdates >>](#)

Media contacts:

Mr. Carl Soderbergh, Director of Policy and Communications, Minority Rights Group International, carl.soderbergh@mrgmail.org, Tel. +44 (0)20 7422 4200

Ms. Rikke Nöhrhind, Coordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network, rn@idsn.org, Tel. +45 60 43 34 32

Mr. Paul Divakar, General Secretary, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, pauldivakar@ncdhr.org.in,
Tel. +91 99100 46813

Ms. Meena Varma, Director, Dalit Solidarity Network – UK, meena.v@dsnuk.org, Tel. +44 (0) 7966 081558