

Appeal to UN Special Procedures mandate holders

In recent years, UN Special Procedures mandate holders have increasingly addressed **caste-based discrimination** – known as discrimination based on work and descent in UN terminology - in reports and communications. All in all, 12 mandate holders have made references to this form of discrimination, which affects an estimated 260 million people globally. Your attention to the issue is a sign of the growing recognition of caste-based discrimination as one of the major international human rights challenges, and illustrates the alarming prevalence of this problem in a number of affected countries.

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) commends all mandate holders for their attention to caste-based discrimination. In particular, IDSN welcomes the support expressed by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Mr Githu Muigai, and the Independent Expert on minority issues, Ms Gay McDougall, for the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the effective elimination of discrimination based on work and descent. These norms constitute the first comprehensive international framework for the elimination of caste-based discrimination.

In an opinion piece last October, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said that it was “time to eradicate the shameful concept of caste” and called on the Human Rights Council to promote the draft UN Principles and Guidelines. On 2 November 2009, Mr Muigai urged states to rally around them. And in February 2010, Ms McDougall also expressed her support, calling these guidelines an “important contribution to the global struggle to combat discrimination on the grounds of work and descent.” IDSN hopes that these statements of support will encourage other mandate holders to address this issue from the perspective of their own mandates, where relevant.

On the occasion of the 17th annual meeting of UN Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Independent Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Human Rights Council (28 June - 2 July 2010), IDSN calls on all relevant mandate holders to:

- Support the draft UN Principles and Guidelines and urge states to endorse them;
- Refer to the draft UN Principles and Guidelines and to situations of caste-based discrimination whenever relevant, and urge state as well as non-state actors to address this issue;
- Integrate provisions of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines into your work;
- Visit affected countries and include the issue of caste-based discrimination in your monitoring and investigations;
- Ensure that caste-based discrimination and affected communities are specifically mentioned, along with other forms of discrimination and discriminated groups, when gathering information – e.g. in the context of questionnaires to governments and civil society actors.
- Consider under relevant agenda items of your annual meetings (possibly Item VI: Coordinated follow-up / Item VII: Joint session with treaty bodies) how to follow up on recommendations and concluding observations related to caste-based discrimination in the work of special procedures, treaty bodies and the UPR process, and make full use of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines in such coordinated efforts.

For your information, IDSN has prepared a compilation of references to caste-based discrimination by UN Special Procedures mandate holders in the past five years. Please find below links to this compilation as well as other relevant documents:

[Draft UN Principles and Guidelines](#)

[UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: "Tearing down the wall of caste"](#)

[Compilation of references to caste-based discrimination by UN Special Procedures](#)

[Comprehensive overview of UN treaty body recommendations on caste-based discrimination](#)

We thank you for your contributions to placing caste-based discrimination on the international human rights agenda and look forward to further co-operation.

IDSN, Copenhagen, 23 June 2010

IDSN Members and Associates: The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) – India; The Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) – Nepal; Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM); Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network; The Human Development Organisation – Sri Lanka; The Dalit Solidarity Network – UK; The Dalit Solidarity Platform – Germany; The Dalit Network – Netherlands; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Denmark; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Sweden; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Belgium; RAFTO Foundation – Norway; National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR) – India; Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) – Nepal; National Federation of Dalit Women – India; Human Rights Watch; The Lutheran World Federation; The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism; Anti-Slavery International; The Minority Rights Group International; The Asian Human Rights Commission; The Robert F. Kennedy Foundation; Pax Romana ICMICA/MIIC; FORUM-ASIA; The World Council of Churches; The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative; Asian Centre for Human Rights; Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice, NYU School of Law