

European Union

IDSN continued engaging with the European Parliament (EP), the European External Action Service (EEAS) and to a lesser extent Council structures, through lobby interventions. IDSN teams of Dalit human rights defenders met with a number of members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and officials of the EEAS in Brussels. At the level of affected countries, IDSN and national Dalit platforms had a constructive engagement with some EU delegations and member state agencies, in particular in Nepal and Bangladesh.

Some EU delegations stepped up country level engagement to address caste discrimination, for example in Bangladesh. According to the EEAS the issue has also been on the agenda in EU seminars and workshops on e.g. social inclusion. EU delegation and EC Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO) officials contributed to the IDSN International Consultation on Good Practices and Strategies to Eliminate Caste-Based Discrimination and ECHO officials also engaged in a national consultation in India on the topic of addressing caste discrimination in Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Relief.

The European Parliament (EP)

On February 28, a joint hearing on caste-based discrimination in South Asia was organized by the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Committee on Development, the Delegation for relations with India and the Delegation for relations with South Asia. Speakers included representatives of EEAS, IDSN and OHCHR, who all specifically noted the lack of enforcement of laws to protect Dalits in South Asia.

IDSN stressed at the hearing that without a policy and special measures, caste discrimination will continue to 'fall off the agenda', whether in human rights dialogues, or in country strategies and development programming.

Maria Lensu, from the European External Action Service, explained how the EEAS are incorporating caste into various programmes and funding the work of Dalit human rights defenders. MEPs speaking at the session urged the EU to do more, following up with press releases and opinion pieces expressing their position. MEP Peter van Dalen stated, "The Parliament needs to take a much more robust stand. Enough words – it's time for action. We must take action through our External Action Service – they need to make caste discrimination a priority."

Concluding the hearing co-chair Ms Kolarska Bobinska pointed out that this was the first in a series of meetings on caste discrimination and that the next one should focus on what action the Parliament can take. With the EP hearing, a long term lobby objective of IDSN was achieved and IDSN was involved in the organisation of the event.

Briefing notes and recommendations to EP committee members had been submitted in advance of the hearing. In a background note on proposed European Parliament action on caste-based discrimination, a series of concrete steps were outlined related to the relevant committees and delegations of the Parliament. EP resolutions before the Human Rights Council session, should follow up on European Parliament Resolution B6-0021/2007 on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India, and delegation visits to affected countries. Delegation members are called upon to include the topic of caste discrimination and measures to eliminate this form of discrimination in exchange of views with parliamentary counterparts and government officials from caste-affected countries and to meet with representatives from Dalit communities during every parliamentary visit to caste-affected countries.

A comprehensive briefing package was provided to the Delegation for Relations with India before a delegation visit to India in April, with country and issue-based information, relevant EP resolutions and UN recommendations, recommendations for an EU policy to address caste based discrimination as well as tools for foreign investors to address caste based discrimination as part of their social responsibility and human rights obligations. This

delegation was, however, not given the opportunity to meet with affected communities, whereas this was the case during the visit to Nepal by the EP Delegation for South Asia in November.

Prior to the last EU-India Summit, held in December 2010, the Chair of the Delegation for South Asia and four other MEPs from different political groups appealed to EU leaders to address human rights abuses against Dalits at the summit, a call that appeared to have little effect on the agenda. No EU-India Summit was held in 2011.

As part of the work with the EP, IDSN followed up with a number of MEPs on recommendations for an EU Policy Framework for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

Finally, IDSN lobbied for text references on caste discrimination for the European Parliament's Annual Human Rights Report 2010 and the European Union's policy on the matter, the result of which is not known at the time of writing.

The European external action Service (eeas)

In the course of the year, IDSN disseminated briefing materials, as well as electronic versions of key documents, including the IDSN compilation of UN references to the issue of caste discrimination to EEAS officials working with caste-affected countries and human rights.

IDSN focused on the need to adequately reflect the situation of caste-affected groups in the EU human rights country strategies, most of which were developed and discussed in the course of 2011. Information was provided to the relevant delegations and EEAS officials in Brussels about key human rights issues affecting Dalits along with recommendations on inclusion of Dalit rights in the human rights country strategies.

Due to the non-public nature of this EU process, it has been difficult to assess to what extent caste-based discrimination has been addressed in the strategies. As the process of developing strategies is meant to involve in-country consultations with civil society, IDSN and national platforms strongly recommended that representatives of Dalit civil society organisations be part of these as well as other regular consultations.

Finally, IDSN promoted the use of relevant UN reports and recommendations through contact with EU delegations in caste affected countries and EEAS officials and continued to lobby for inclusion of issues on caste discrimination in dialogues between the EU and caste-affected countries.

IDSN also continued to call for EU support for the endorsement and use of the UN P&G through contact with EU and member state missions to the UN in Geneva.

Council working Party on Human Rights (COHOM)

Whereas IDSN had expectations for progress of discussion in the Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) on EU action to eliminate caste discrimination, with a point of departure in the COHOM hearing on caste discrimination in 2010, and subsequent discussion of the issue in this forum, it appears that some EU member states hesitate to advance the EU position on this particular human rights issue. It has not been possible to monitor to what extent caste discrimination is included as a topic in human rights and policy dialogues with caste-affected countries, as was decided by COHOM in 2010.

Ec project “ending ‘untouchability’: European action to eliminate caste discrimination”

A three year project commenced in January under the European Commission grant provision for “Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development: Coordination, cooperation and networking activities among European organisations”.

The project, which is co-financed by DanChurchAid, provided the financial basis for the International Consultation on Good Practices and Strategies to Eliminate Caste-Based Discrimination held in November in 2011, the organisation of which was a major activity of IDSN in the second part of the year.

The project also covered production of a new introductory documentary video on caste discrimination, a survey on public knowledge and opinion on caste discrimination carried out in eight European countries as well as support to developing or upgrading websites of Dalit Solidarity Networks.

Work to develop a general framework for elimination of caste discrimination in disaster relief and rehabilitation programmes was also initiated under the project, based on a best practice case study from India.