

## European Union

2012 was a very productive year for IDSN's work with EU institutions. IDSN strengthened its cooperation with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and parliamentary committees, noting a much increased interest by all political groups and a corresponding high number of resolution references and recommendations on caste discrimination. The year ended with a plenary debate on caste discrimination in India and the adoption of an urgency resolution. A dialogue with COHOM was resumed in November and in the course of the year several exchanges with EU officials took place at country and Brussels level. Overall IDSN increased submissions to the EU on thematic issues and country situations.

### EU support to DSN and IDSN work

The 2011-2013 EC project 'Ending 'untouchability': European action to eliminate caste discrimination' held by IDSN covered production of two new introductory films on caste discrimination. 'We are not untouchable' and 'Dalit women' were launched in 2012, as were the new websites of a number of Dalit Solidarity Networks using a common design template. In addition, DSNs hosted several national level seminars and other events under the project.

A comprehensive advocacy package for mobilisation of MEPs was finalised in June. It included briefing papers, an appeal to EU institutions, a campaign website with the films and an online petition for MEPs, as well as a facebook page 'End Caste Discrimination'.<sup>26</sup> At least 250 MEPs were approached through direct mail. The campaign is long term, but judging from the results of working with MEPs and EP institutions, it has proved to be an effective awareness raising and outreach tool.

Work also continued under the project to develop a brief and recommendations for multiple stakeholders for elimination of caste discrimination in disaster relief and rehabilitation programmes, based on a best practice case study from India.

### The European Parliament (EP)

The European Parliament sent a clear message of solidarity to millions of victims of caste discrimination in India with the unanimous adoption of an urgency resolution on Dalits in India on 13 December 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.

In November, recent cases of atrocities against Dalits, i.e. the Dharmapuri arson case, and the multiple examples of gang rapes against Dalit women, in Haryana, were brought to the attention of MEPs by an IDSN team. This led to the urgency resolution on the two cases with a comprehensive text on the general human rights situation of Dalits in India.

In the resolution, the European Parliament 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 also 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 the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

IDSN submitted input, including case material, to political groups. Sixty MEPs co-signed their parties' respective text motions, and 15 MEPs spoke in Plenary about the atrocities, the lack of basic human rights protection for Dalits and the failure of law enforcement in India.

While the official EU Annual Reports on Human Rights in the World to date have ignored caste discrimination, the EP Resolution on the 2010 version of this report, adopted in April, included two strong paragraphs on caste. In the succeeding resolution on the Annual Report 2011, adopted on 13 December, the EP further sharpened its critique on caste discrimination and its recommendations for EU action. IDSN had provided input for both resolutions.

Text proposals on caste discrimination for the EIDHR and Development Cooperation Instruments that regulate funding for EU programmes were introduced as amendments by MEPs to the draft reports. The Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) report voted on in the Committee on Development in October thus has references to caste-based discrimination in annexes on Asia and thematic programmes. The draft EIDHR legislation also contains several references to caste discrimination as a theme covered under the instrument. Both pieces of legislation will be finalised in 2013 subject to negotiations between various EU institutions.

In July, The Parliamentary Committee on Development (DEVE) requested a study on EU action to address caste discrimination. IDSN had prepared a background note, which served as input for the group coordinators' meeting in July. The study initiated in October by external consultants will be subject for discussion in DEVE in 2013.

In the course of the year, IDSN submitted several briefing packages to the Sub-Committee on Human Rights, the Delegation for Relations with India, and the Delegation for Relations with South Asia. According to Chairs of the delegations, the issue of caste discrimination has been raised in meetings in connection with country visits.

Finally, several parliamentary questions were posed to the EU Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Commission Vice-President, Catherine Ashton, on how caste discrimination is addressed in EU development and human rights policies.

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**India has legislated on certain levels, but with little success... we therefore strongly urge that the Indian government and authorities – from local to the highest state level – protect and defend the rights of Dalits, and where necessary, enact new legislation.** Barbara Lochbihler, Chair of the EP Sub-Committee on Human Rights

**One of the biggest problems is that people who have destroyed the houses of Dalits, treated them as slaves and forced them into prostitution, are not brought to justice. even worse, every year hundreds, possibly even thousands, of Dalits are tortured by the police. The Dalits in India are virtually outlawed.”** Peter van Dalen, Dutch MEP

**I am appalled that Dalits in India have not seen their situation improved. The violent actions recently have shown how little has been done. It is clear that dominant castes are organising violent acts against Dalits. Unfortunately, the Indian authorities do not take their human rights responsibilities seriously.** Mitro Repo, Finnish MEP

(Statements during the debate on 13 December)

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### **The council working Party on Human rights (COHOM)**

In November, IDSN was invited for an informal exchange on caste discrimination with COHOM now chaired by the External Action Service (EEAS). Dalit representatives from Nepal and India and the IDSN coordinator had a constructive dialogue with member states and urged COHOM to develop an EU policy on caste discrimination.

Before the exchange, IDSN was requested by EEAS to provide input to the EU Annual Human Rights Action Plan 2013. Annual Action Plans were launched as a common tool for EU institutions and member states with adoption of the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights in June 2012.

### **The european external action Service (EEAS)**

In February, IDSN disseminated outcome documents from the December 2011 International Consultation on Good Practices and Strategies to Address Caste Discrimination to a wider group of EU stakeholders.<sup>32</sup> In the course of the year, IDSN provided country and issue-based briefings, recommendations and relevant information from the UN on caste-related issues to EEAS and Commission officials. A number of meetings were held with officials in Brussels with different IDSN teams, which have included representatives from India and Nepal as well as DSNs from the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, and Belgium.

IDSN lobbied the EEAS, and the EU delegation in India in particular, to include caste discrimination as a theme in EU human rights country strategies and the EU-India human rights dialogue (which was not held in 2012), and to have regular consultations with Dalit civil society representatives. The specific outcome related to human rights strategies is unknown as documents remain confidential. However, representatives of the EU working group on human rights at member state embassies and the EU delegation in India held several dialogue meetings with civil society on caste issues. In some other caste-affected countries there are regular points of contact between Dalit organisations and the EU delegation. Furthermore, it is encouraging that Dalit organisations have been allocated considerable grants from the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) for regional and country level projects.

In November, IDSN was invited by the Commission to give presentations at a staff lunch-time conference for around 50 participants. Asha Kowtal from India, Bhakta Bishwakarma from Nepal, and Rikke Nöhrind, IDSN Coordinator, spoke on the occasion.