

European Union

On 10 October, the European Parliament adopted a comprehensive and strongly worded resolution on caste discrimination. The resolution and the preceding debate constitute one of the highlights so far of IDSN's long-standing engagement with EU institutions. All in all, it was a productive year with a further consolidation of relations with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and parliamentary committees. By the end of 2013, more than 100 MEPs had demonstrated their commitment towards the elimination of caste discrimination. IDSN also continued its dialogue on the issue with a number of other EU institutions, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU humanitarian office (ECHO).

European Parliament

IDSN's close cooperation with the European Parliament throughout 2013 included regular contact and meetings with MEPs, submissions to parliamentary committees and input to parliamentary resolutions. The responses from MEPs were often favourable. Many of them spoke in EP debates, sponsored or co-sponsored motions for resolutions, signed an IDSN petition calling for an end to caste discrimination or posted articles and messages on the issue.

IDSN continued to make submissions on caste related developments in affected countries and in the UN to Committees and delegations, including the Delegation for relations with India. Some members of the delegation visited India in April and ensured that the question of caste discrimination was brought up in several meetings, and a Dalit women representative invited to meet the delegation.

The build-up to the important October resolution on caste discrimination started early in the year. In February, the EP's Committee on Development (DEVE) published and discussed a study that it had commissioned in 2012. 'A human rights and poverty review: EU action in addressing caste-based discrimination' recommended stronger EU action on the issue, including the integration of measures against caste discrimination into policies, strategies and development programmes that deal with caste-affected countries.

The study became the starting point of a process that culminated in the October resolution. In July, members of DEVE discussed the need for an EU policy on caste discrimination and concluded that the EU needs to take a much more robust stance on the issue. They called for the recognition of caste as a ground of discrimination which must be tackled together with other grounds of discrimination. MEP Thijs Berman warned that without an EU policy on caste discrimination, it would fall off the agenda.

In September, DEVE unanimously approved the draft resolution on caste discrimination. The debate and adoption of the resolution by the whole European Parliament then took place on 10 October with a large number of MEPs making thoughtful and well-informed remarks on the issue.

Leonidas Donskis, a Lithuanian MEP who has been one of the strongest supporters of the struggle against caste discrimination, called it "one of the biggest paradoxes of the 21st century." He added that "as the world gets smaller and becomes a common arena of all humankind, as the border between the local and the global fades, as human rights become a universal, not a national affair, hundreds of millions of people still remain robbed of the right to be a human and to enjoy even the most basic human rights."

The resolution calls on EU institutions to recognise and address caste discrimination on par with other grounds of such as ethnicity, race, religion, gender and sexuality; to include the issue in EU legislation and human rights policies; and to raise it at the highest level with governments of caste-affected countries. IDSN welcomed the resolution as an important message to the EU system as well as governments in caste-affected countries.

During the debate, EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmström claimed that caste discrimination is a “high priority for the EU.” She listed a number of tools that the EU uses to fight it, with an approach that “is tailor-made to the countries most affected by this problem.” However, many MEPs said that much more should be done to fight this form of discrimination.

The resolution received considerable press coverage, including in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and various Indian media outlets²⁹. The adoption of the resolution has also resounded within the UN system. It was commented upon by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, in her speech on caste discrimination at the House of Lords in the UK on 6th November. IDSN shared news about the resolution through its media outlets and targeted letters to more than 200 UN, EU and government officials, and parliamentarians.

Five other EP resolutions adopted in 2013 contained references to caste discrimination. In January, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on violence against women in India, an issue that was highlighted in the wake of the brutal gang-rape of a 23-year old female student in Delhi in late 2012. The resolution included numerous references to caste and the situation of Dalit women.

It expressed “deep concern about the widespread violence committed against Dalit women and girls in India, including sexual violence” and appealed to the EU to ensure that human rights and democracy are observed in all aspects of its relations with its partners. The resolution stressed the importance of fighting all forms of discrimination, including caste-based discrimination. It also called on the EU to pay particular attention to caste discrimination and to consider urging caste-affected countries to ensure that laws against the caste system are genuinely implemented.

On 13 June, an EP resolution urged the EU to adopt an ambitious position on the post-2015 global development framework. It called for the framework to be underpinned by human rights principles and address inequality, discrimination, gender-based violence and other issues with special attention being paid to the rights of groups such as people suffering caste-based discrimination.³¹ The October resolution on caste discrimination also paid attention to the post-MDG discussion – MEPs urged the EU to promote a caste-sensitive post-2015 development agenda and to “ensure that caste discrimination is explicitly addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty, and as a root cause of structural inequalities.”

On 11 December, the EP adopted no less than three resolutions that included references to caste discrimination. The resolution on the EU’s annual human rights report appealed to the EU to ensure that human rights and democracy are observed in all aspects of its relations with its partners. The resolution stressed the importance of fighting all forms of discrimination, including caste-based discrimination. It also called on the EU to pay particular attention to caste discrimination and to consider urging caste-affected countries to ensure that laws against the caste system are genuinely implemented.

Two important resolutions on EU financing instruments for the promotion of democracy and human rights, and development cooperation (DCI) mention caste. The European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) 2014-2020 specifically mention caste as a ground of discrimination to be addressed on par with other forms of discrimination. This is also reflected in The Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for EIDHR 2014-2020 which include wording on “fighting discrimination based on caste, work, descent or gender identity” and hence guarantees that “support will be provided to civil society organizations working for the promotion of those rights and support to programmes and policies also in these areas”.

MEPs also continued to ask caste-related parliamentary questions to the EU Commission. In June, for example, Fiorenzo Provera and Charles Tannock, specifically referred to the UN side event on Dalit women when they asked High Representative Catherine Ashton to explain the EU’s policy on caste discrimination. One of their three

questions was “What steps is the EU prepared to take to work with the UN Human Rights Council to persuade governments in South Asia to adopt improved measures to implement legislation that ensures the rights of Dalit women are fully respected?”³³ High Representative Ashton replied in August, claiming that the EU “is active in the UN context.” She also wrote that EU financial instruments target caste discrimination and its effects.

European Commission/EEAS

Updates on key developments on caste issues in affected countries and the UN were shared with EU officials in meetings and through submissions. These included highlights and recommendations in advance of the EU-India human rights dialogue, eventually held in New Delhi in November, at which the EP resolution on caste discrimination was brought up.

IDSN teams with South Asian representatives met on several occasions with policy, programme and geographical units in Brussels. IDSN staff and Asha Kowtal from AIDMAM in India, participated in the EIDHR Annual Forum in April. Members of the IDSN executive group, including Paul Divakar and Manjula Pradeep from India, and Durga Sob from Nepal met with senior officials and also MEPs in September.

In addition, communication and interaction with EU delegations in some affected countries, for example Nepal, were particularly encouraging, indicating a growing commitment by the EU to tackle caste discrimination at various levels of policy and programming. Cooperation with ECHO is a notable case in point.

In September, IDSN published a report on the situation of Dalits in humanitarian emergencies. ‘Equality in aid: Addressing caste discrimination in humanitarian response’ argues that Dalits and other groups suffering from caste discrimination are particularly exposed to natural hazards and are likely to be discriminated against when disasters strike and humanitarian aid is distributed. The report contains a comprehensive set of recommendations that would enable humanitarian actors to ensure that Dalit and similarly affected groups are not excluded from disaster prevention and response.

‘Equality in aid’ is based on a comprehensive Indian case study which was undertaken by National Dalit Watch and the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in 2012.³⁶ The Indian case study as well as the IDSN report have been produced with financial assistance from the European Union as part of the 2011-2013 European Commission project ‘Ending Untouchability: European action to eliminate caste discrimination’. This project has also enabled IDSN to produce two introductory films on caste discrimination and assist Dalit Solidarity Networks across Europe in launching new websites with a common design template.