

Declaration of the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) in its VIII National Convention on 26th June 2009, New Delhi

We, the Dalit Women delegates assembled at the VIII National Convention organized by NFDW, held in New Delhi on 26th of June 2009, after deliberation on the issues of "**Persistent Poverty, Powerlessness and Protection from Violence**" adopt unanimously this declaration, as a plan of action for the movement and the organizations working for the development of Dalit Women as well as policy intervention and implementation within the purview of union government (June 2009) and the state governments for Dalit Women.

We are mindful of the fact that even after 62 years of the independence the Dalit community is denied of basic human rights and is also at the receiving end of the most brutal and oppressive forms of discrimination, exclusion and segregation.

We, Dalits constitute 16.23% of total population of India and Dalit women numbering 49.96% of the total Dalit population. Recognizing the relative backwardness of the SC's the Constitution of India cast a special responsibility on the State to promote with special care, the education and economic interest of SC's and promises to protect them from all forms of exploitation and social injustice (Art - 46).

We are concerned that Dalit women in India suffer from three **oppressions: gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, being from the poorest and most marginalized communities; and caste, coming from the lowest caste, the 'untouchables'**. Although discrimination on the basis of caste is against the Indian constitution and prohibited by many laws, its practice is still widespread, especially in rural India.

Persistent Poverty

About 80% of SC's live in rural areas with inadequate access to fixed capital assets and exceptionally high percentage of SC's households they are dependent on wage employment and three fourth of the SC persons/ household are landless. The NSS data on employment for 2000 indicate that the SC workers suffer discrimination both in employment and wage earning in the labour market.

With lack of access to fixed sources of income and high incidence of high rate of under-employment and low wage earning, the SCs household suffers from low income, and high incidences of poverty. This is reflected in the proportion of persons falling below a critical minimum level of consumption expenditure, what is called the poverty line. In 1999-2000 about 35.43% of SC persons were below the poverty line in rural areas as compared to only 21% for others (non-SC/ST) in urban areas the gap was slightly larger 39% of SC and only 15% among other.

The Government of India has also established several programs for the development of Dalits. According to NHRC, however, the beneficial impact of these programs has been hindered by inadequate investment of public resources; non-utilization or diversion of funds earmarked for Dalit development; lack of programs specifically targeted to Dalit development; poor preparation such projects; and a lack of monitoring of development programs, leading to the failure of many such programs to reach their target groups.

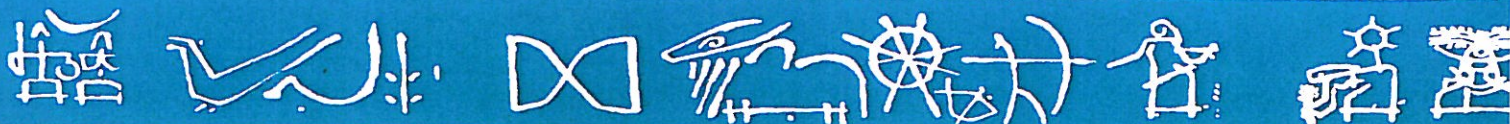
Violence

Violence and discrimination is a matter of daily experience of Dalit women a relentless cycle of oppression that takes the brutal form of organized rape, and sexual violence; sexual humiliation, molestation and discrimination (less than equal wages) at the workplace, forced into dehumanizing jobs like manual scavenging and garbage, picking and pushed by the gruelling cycle of generational poverty, landlessness and hunger, into life-long indebtedness including religiously sanctioned prostitution. It is this linkage that makes Dalit women, a vital and special concern for UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and UN Committee on Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Human Rights Council.

Additionally, India has failed to address the multiple axes of discrimination faced by Dalits women; including their unequal access to services, employment opportunities, and justice mechanisms as compared to Dalit men-and threats to their personal security, including through the system of Devedasi, in which a girl, usually before reaching the of puberty, is ceremoniously dedicated or married to a deity or to a temple.

DALIT WOMEN'S CHARTER OF DEMANDS

- **Recognize SC women as a distinct category** among women and accordingly make segregated data on Dalit women available in census reports, action taken reports and progress reports, evolve national- and state- level perspective plans for mainstreaming SC women in developmental programmes, markets enterprises, financial allocation, reservation facilities in education, employment and health facilities and mandate the National and State Commissions for SCs and women to study and report specifically the status of SC women in their annual reports.



- **A commission on Land reforms** to be soon set up which will specifically look into issues of – (a) continued possession and effective uses of land distributed earlier SCs under various programmes/ legislative intervention; and (b) availability of land for distribution to SC landless families.
- **Ensure that each Dalit family will own 5 acres cultivable land for socio-economic well-being and ownership should be in the name of Women.** The Government should pursue all possible measures including the distribution of surplus land, Government revenue lands and temple lands within a specific timeframe. If the need be, the Government should purchase cultivate land and distribute it among Dalits.
- **Enact legislation and enforce the right of Dalit agricultural labourers to living wages, to gender parity in wages, to job security, to better working condition and welfare measures and ensure punitive measures against offenders.**
- **There is an immediate need to monitor implementation of programmes** under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan. A Committee meant for this purpose will be set up to ensure that each Ministry's allocation of the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCCP) is indicated well in advance. Further if any particular Ministry is not able to utilize the earmarked allocation, action should be initiated to transfer the unused funds available to those Ministries/Departments which have implemented the SCCP more effectively.
- Despite commitments made to the eradication of the obnoxious and dehumanizing practice of handling night soil manually, it still continues. Only 19 State and all UTs have adopted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition Act 1993). 9 State are yet to adopt the Act. A New schemes, namely Self Employment Schemes for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers has been formulated to rehabilitate the remaining 3.42 lakh scavengers out of the total number of 7.73 lakh in a time-bound manner by March, 2009 (?) through training and extension of loans and subsidy. This is to be done on a mission mode with commitment and zeal.
- All effort must be made to fully implement laws to protect SC women's rights (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1995 and ensure the abolition of 'untouchability in compliance with Article 17 of the Constitution. Special protection mechanisms have to be evolved for SC women who have filed police complaints against grievous caste based atrocities.
- Make it statutory for Parliament and State assemblies to debate on the annual reports of the National and state- level Commission for SC and Safai Karamcharis within the following year, and made public. And ensure that the action is taken under clear statutory stipulations.
- We Dalit women demand our **Right to Life free from "Untouchability", Right to Life with Self Respect & Dignity with Educational equality and parity and Relevant economic policies & programmes for development and economic liberation and with due share of National resources and wealth, Self reliance. Revitalization and effective implementation of Scheduled Caste Sub Plan, Dalit friendly Personnel policy, Access to Justice and address impunity against atrocities and exploitation.**

"I am conscious of the fact that if women are conscientised the untouchable community will progress. I believe that women should organize and this will play a major role in bringing an end to social evils the progress of the Dalit community should be measured in term of the progress made by its womenfolk."

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, speech to the Dalit Mahila Federation in 1942

(Finalized version with the input from the Convention will be circulated with in a month's time)

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