

DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK - DENMARK

Caste discrimination as a Danish focus area

The Dalit Solidarity Network in Denmark (DSN-DK) welcomes the initiative to conduct a hearing on Dalits and caste discrimination in the Danish Parliament. Denmark has engaged in this human rights problem in several ways, and it has been the aim of DSN-DK that this engagement is maintained and enhanced in the future.

Hence, DSN-DK proposes the following recommendations to the Danish Government:

1. Caste discrimination as a focus area in Danish human rights policy

DSN-DK recommends that caste discrimination is added to the list of focus areas in Denmark's human rights policy, which currently include torture, death penalty, indigenous peoples, rights of disabled people, and corporate social responsibility of Danish companies.

Denmark's human rights policy is based on the following principles and objectives:

- That human rights are protected for all without discrimination on any grounds;
- That human rights are promoted and protected in all countries regardless of political, social, cultural or any other background;
- That promotion of democratization and respect for human rights should be part of development activities;
- That international protection of human rights should be enhanced, particularly by strengthening international control of human rights compliance and by ensuring that monitoring bodies have adequate financial basis for their work.

A priority to make caste discrimination a focus area in Denmark's human rights policies fit well with the broad principles and objectives. It would mean that efforts can be deployed in all relevant international forums in the same way as Denmark has worked to promote, for example, indigenous peoples' rights and the abolition of torture.

In essence, this would include enhanced efforts from the Danish side in UN human rights institutions, in cooperation with other states for initiatives to combat caste discrimination, including the establishment of an international legal framework to combat such form of discrimination.

Denmark could also promote a specific EU policy for the region and thus ensure relevant work of EU institutions and coherence in key EU policy areas. A stronger EU focus on caste discrimination would strengthen the EU's capacity to act continuously in international forums in the region, and ensure the integration of caste discrimination dimensions in its political, trade and aid relations with relevant countries. There is a need for a much more proactive approach, including a more systematic response to specific current situations, than there is today. There is also the need for developing specific policy instruments and methodological approaches to development assistance and to qualify the EU's political and human rights dialogue with caste-affected countries.

Denmark has in international fora played a leading role in promoting initiatives to ensure and support the rights of Dalits in the UN and the EU.

2. Increased focus on caste discrimination in bilateral and regional co-operation

DSN-DK recommends that an initiative is made to explore ways to implement strategies that reflect an *increased* focus on caste discrimination for cooperation and development efforts, regionally in South Asia as well as at country level in caste affected countries.

In the Danish Government's Asia strategy 'Denmark in Asia', it was pointed out that Danish NGOs have specific competencies in advocating for Dalits' rights in particular and that the Government will launch initiatives focusing on this

group among others. It is recommended that the civil society strategy clarifies this commitment and identifies Dalits as a vulnerable group covered by the strategy.

DANIDA has in its development assistance programmes had caste discrimination as a major priority in cooperation with, for example, Nepal. Moreover, Denmark has provided support to national and international civil society organizations working in the area, and financed a regional research project about caste-based discrimination in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

3. Promoting Danish companies' social responsibility in the context of caste discrimination

In the case of companies working in the private sector in caste-affected countries DSN-DK recommends that the official Denmark urges Danish businesses to take the necessary measures to avoid contributing to caste discrimination within their sphere of influence. This could be launched as a special measure under the Government's overall action plan for corporate social and developed in collaboration between businesses, government, including the Foreign Ministry and embassies, as well as interest organizations.

Denmark has already made a significant contribution in this area by supporting the development of a Dalit Discrimination Check - a tool for businesses to the identification and handling of caste discrimination in India.

4. Enhance research, education and information about caste discrimination

Danish research and educational institutions have a significant deficit in terms of investigating, documenting and analyzing caste discrimination and its impact on community development and the affected populations in South Asia. Development and human rights studies and perspectives in the field can contribute to an enhanced understanding of the problem at a theoretical and practical level. Furthermore, relevant Danish institutions should address this issue in cooperation with research institutions in relevant countries.

Denmark has a strong tradition of research, education and information on a range of human rights and development-related topics, such as apartheid, globalization and poverty reduction. However, there has been little insight and research into the problem of caste discrimination and no teaching materials in schools, universities and other educational institutions to address the issue comprehensively.

The primary purpose of clarifying and strengthening Danish policy priorities in the area of caste discrimination is to contribute to the elimination of one of the world's biggest rights problems, and to ensure long-term active political efforts, including concrete assistance initiatives following the formulation of relevant policies and tools. It is recommended that the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a working group to formulate a policy and plan on this particular area.

References

The Government's human rights policy (in Danish):

http://www.um.dk/da/menu/Udenrigspolitik/GlobaleEmner/Menneskerettigheder/DanskMenneskerettighedspolitik/?wbc_purpose=bas&WBCMODE=PresentationUnpublish%2cPresentationUnpublish

"Denmark in Asia" (in Danish) (<http://www.um.dk/NR/rdonlyres/AB1A9687-832F-4817-ADCE-689939A0714C/0/AsienStrategiDkWeb.pdf>)

The Danish Government's plan for companies' social corporate responsibility (in Danish)

http://www.oem.dk/graphics/oem/nyheder/Pressemeddelelser%202008/CSR-Handlingsplan_press.pdf

"Dalit Discrimination Check" http://www.idsn.org/Documents/pdf/DALIT_DISCRIMINATION_CHECK.pdf

Background note on the UN study on discrimination based on work and descent

http://www.idsn.org/Documents/un/pdf/Background_note_DBWD_study.pdf.pdf

IDSN recommendations to the EU: http://www.idsn.org/Documents/eu/pdf/IDSN_recommendations_EU.pdf