



## PRESS RELEASE 8.10.2013

Minister for Foreign Affairs Erkki Tuomioja promised active measures in fighting caste discrimination.

"Only recently Finland took part in the implementation of a UN Human Rights Council seminar in Geneva, with the theme of discrimination of Dalit women. This was the first time for Finland to take such an initiative, but it certainly wasn't the last", promised Minister for Foreign Affairs **Erkki Tuomioja** in a discussion on caste discrimination and policy making.

"Anti-discrimination and stronger participation are central in the Finnish policy, and most vulnerable groups require special attention. There is every reason to include Dalits as a distinctive group."

Foreign Minister Tuomioja promised to remember caste-based discrimination as an issue on the agenda when he next visits India.

Member of Parliament, Vice Chair of the Finnish Centre Party **Annika Saarikko** called for strong measures to fight the discrimination of Dalits. "I am convinced that the human rights of Dalits are not solely an internal question of any nation state, but an international human rights issue. Why doesn't this issue attract more publicity? It is only when we find these discriminated people in Europe that we take better notice of it."

The Editor-in-Chief of Suomen Kuvailehti, **Tapani Ruokanen**, pointed out that "human rights principles are fine as such but the problem lies with their implementation. Civil society organisations are needed to bring these issues to a wider public arena. Media companies depend on existing power structures and cannot fulfil all needs alone. Activism that raises awareness is required for fundamental change."

"In the West we are afraid to tackle cultural issues because of the shadow of imperialism. We have to find a balance between human rights values and cultural sensitivity", said Ruokanen. "It took decades to actualize the rights of black people. It was only 50 years ago when Martin Luther King gave his speech. This tells us how it was only the first steps that were really taken."

When addressing corporate responsibility of Finnish companies that operate in caste countries Foreign Minister Tuomioja reminded the audience of the potential of the civil society. "The corporate brand is important, and no company wants to have it tarnished. However, strong international agreements are needed to complement national legislation."

"Money is a tough consultant in the global reality", exemplified Annika Saarikko.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Tuomioja, Member of Parliament Saarikko and Editor-in-Chief Ruokanen talked in an event organised by the Dalit Solidarity Network in Finland on 8th October 2013. The event called "Why doesn't the caste question become more political?" was part of the Development Cooperation Week of the University of Helsinki Student Union. The discussion was led by second year theology student Tia Orpana.

For more information please contact Chair of Dalit Solidarity Network in Finland, Mikko Malkavaara, phone +358 400 874 563.