

Visit to Dhaka of UN Experts: Involvement of Dalit activists

Press Conference - 3 December 2009:

Two independent UN experts recently visited Bangladesh. On the first day of their visit, the Human Rights Forum on Universal Periodic Review (UPR), organised a press conference to brief the media about the visit. As an active member of the UPR forum, the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) took part in the press conference. BDERM advisor Zakir Hossain and the organisation's General Secretary Bothanki Solomon briefed journalists on the human rights situation of the Dalit community with a particular reference to the poverty dimension and severe water and sanitation problems. The BDERM representatives answered numerous questions from the press. A former advisor to the caretaker government and executive director of Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), Sultana Kamal and Syeed Ahmed also addressed the press conference and elaborated on the human rights situation and the purpose of the country visit of the UN experts. The local media gave due importance to the event.

Joint Meeting with Human Rights Organisations:

The independent UN experts met with Human Rights Organisations in a joint meeting in Dhaka to familiarise themselves with the overall situation. Zakir Hossain and Bothanki Solomon were invited to the meeting. The BDERM representatives addressed the inhuman situation of Dalit Communities, especially the lack of access to safe water and the unhygienic sanitation facilities of the colonies. They also informed the UN experts that Dalits are living in chronic poverty for many reasons, and they are forced to live in restricted areas, so-called 'colonies'.

Dalit Colony Visit in Dhaka:

On 9 December the two independent experts visited the Gonoktuli Dalit colony in Dhaka together with two human rights officers of OHCHR. Gonoktuli is the largest of the city's 17 Dalit colonies. The UN team observed the housing situation: very poor health facilities, open toilets, an inadequate water supply — none at the household level, 1000 people using two wells, common bath facilities for men and women, lack of clean water. They also discussed low income levels, children's access to education, living conditions of women and access to employment. BDERM facilitated this visit.

Concluding Press Conference – 10 December 2009:

The independent UN experts met with journalists at a press conference at the end of their visit to Bangladesh. They expressed their serious concerns about the situation in the places they visited and shared their observations on extreme poverty, water and sanitation which are all relevant to the human rights situation in Bangladesh. They also briefed the media on the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh.



These photographs were taken during the visit of the UN experts to the Gonoktuli Dalit colony in Dhaka on 9 December. Photos: BDERM