

# Dalit Rights are Human Rights

*One World Action's **Just Politics** Program*



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***“If you are not considered to be human, human rights do not apply to you”***

**Moni Rani, Director, Dalit Women’s Forum (DWF), Bangladesh**

260 million people worldwide continue to experience discrimination based on their caste. Caste discrimination remains one of the most severe and forgotten human rights abuses of the twenty first century. It leads to extreme poverty and powerlessness which contribute to exploitation and violence against the ‘untouchables’ - the Dalits.

In Bangladesh there are an estimated 5 million Dalits. In Dhaka, Dalit communities live in so called ‘colonies’ - deprived or excluded from adequate housing, sanitation and transport. Working in the most menial jobs, they have difficulty accessing schools and hospitals. Approximately 96% are illiterate.

Dalit women face discrimination, exclusion and violence as a result of both their caste and gender. Over 83% of Dalit girls drop out of school at secondary level - the most crucial factor in escaping poverty. Given the vast numbers of Dalit women and men living in poverty, the MDGs will not be achieved if Dalits continue to be excluded, and their human rights denied.



# One World Action's **Just Politics** Programme

***“Through One World Action, funded by DFID, we have trained and organised Dalits in Dhaka, so for the first time in our history we are starting to live a more dignified and hopeful life. Our children now go to school, we are voting, we have lobbied for better healthcare and housing, and our existence is finally being recognised”***

**Bothanki Solomon, Director, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)**

One World Action's goal is to create the opportunity for the world's poorest and most excluded women and men to transform their own lives, and to challenge the policies that make and keep them poor and powerless. Women's empowerment is central to all we do.

For over twenty years we have supported the most marginalised people to hold their local and national governments to account, enabling them to have more control over decisions that determine their ability to fight poverty. We do this by working directly with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We focus on inequality and exclusion because they create poverty, hamper growth, undermine accountability, weaken governance and cause conflict.

One World Action's Just Politics programme in Bangladesh, funded through our Programme Partnership Agreement with DFID, is supporting the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and the Dalit Women's Forum (DWF) to ensure that Dalits participate in, and influence the decisions that impact their lives. The full participation of Dalit women and men in public life is the only guarantee of their rights being protected and upheld.

***The following images and words are from Dalit communities in Dhaka who in the face of extreme poverty and exclusion are demanding action and creating change.***





“We live in cramped and crowded slums. Families of 5 or 6 people often live and sleep in one room - we have no privacy. Private landlords refuse to rent to a Dalit. They tell us, ‘You are Dalit people. We have nothing for you.’”



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ACTION  
FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD

**BIDERM** Bangladesh Dalit and  
Excluded Rights Movement  
বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত সম্প্রদায়ী অধিকার আন্দোলন





“Dirty water in this community causes typhoid, malaria, diarrhoea and vomiting.”



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FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD

**BIDERM** Bangladesh Doh and Excluded Rights Movement  
বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত সম্প্রদায়ী অধিকার আন্দোলন





“We work as sweepers for the City Corporation - we make the city clean but nobody cleans for us.”



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“When I was at school the teacher told us, ‘You Dalits will never be more than cleaners. Dalit people are only good for sweeping, not for studying.’ Before we opened this school our children thought they would also be sweepers. But now they want to be doctors or lawyers.”



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“The police ignore Dalits. People say we are unclean and shun us. We hide our identity, names and language at the hospital so we can get decent treatment. Our community has been here for 15 years but is under constant threat of eviction.”



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“We have many dreams for our children - to be educated, to speak Bangla, to get jobs, to have good food - the chances we never had.”



**ONE WORLD ACTION**  
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**BIDERM** Bangladesh Doll and Excluded Rights Movement  
বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত সম্প্রদায়ী অধিকার আন্দোলন





“In a country where 84% live on less than \$2 a day, Dalit women are the poorest of the poor. We are double Dalit and also face discrimination within our own families. We don’t want a bank account or cars, but we want honourable lives, education and dignity.”



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“We would like to do different jobs from our parents and grandparents but whenever we try people tell us, ‘You are Dalit.’ If I opened a tea shop no one would come. This is my fate, but this fate is not from God, it is from man.”





“I went to my Commissioner to ask for a scholarship as I did well in my exams. He said, ‘I won’t sign this. You are a Dalit girl. You are not fit for higher education.’ I begged him but he ripped up my form. So my mother took a loan to educate me - I will not give up, I want to be the first Dalit



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“Throughout my life I have faced discrimination, violence and attacks, but now women are strengthening their position within their families and communities. We are coming into the light.”



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"I am Sonu Rani, I am 21 and the first Dalit woman to be elected to my Local Council. In my community women do not go to the local hall, so during the election campaign I invited them to my house. When they came, I explained the importance of our voice and participation in changing things. We need to address issues such as water, housing and education but most importantly we need to say what we think and be part of the solution."





“We are lobbying the Government and international donors to tackle caste discrimination and include Dalits in Bangladesh’s development. The Dalit Women’s Forum is providing human rights and literacy training, livelihood projects and financial services. There is a young generation of leaders developing amongst Dalit women who are serving as role models.”



## **Just Politics Recommendations for Dalit Rights and Just Services**

Given the UK's renewed commitment to both meeting the MDGs and in standing firm on human rights in international relationships - both multilateral and bilateral - we are calling on the UK Government and DFID to:

- ▶ Ensure that tackling caste discrimination is an integral part of all relevant multilateral and bilateral aid programmes, developing clear benchmarks, disaggregated data and indicators to monitor this.
- ▶ Scale up and earmark funding to explicitly address caste discrimination and exclusion.
- ▶ Take action to push for the adoption of the UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent at the UN Human Rights Council.
- ▶ Recognise caste discrimination as a priority human rights and development issue and request Heads of Mission in caste-affected countries to raise the issue at all appropriate opportunities.
- ▶ Work with the European Union towards a cross-European policy framework for the effective elimination of caste discrimination.
- ▶ Ensure transparent and participatory engagement of Dalit women and men in the design, delivery and evaluation of all programmes in caste-affected countries and develop partnerships with Dalit led organisations.
- ▶ Take on the Ambedkar Principles and work to ensure that non-discriminatory employment principles are adopted by UK NGOs and foreign investors engaging with caste-affected countries.

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