

Private Sector

Dalit Solidarity Networks have been involved in national chapters of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) for a number of years, bringing the issue of caste discrimination on to the human rights and business agenda of the ETI members, by highlighting the interrelation between caste and various forms of labour rights violations.

IDSN was involved in the development of a draft international joint position paper on caste discrimination by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) involving the ETI UK, ETI Denmark and ETI Norway in coalition with Dalit Solidarity Networks (DSNs) in the UK, Denmark and Norway. This process started in 2012 in the Danish ETI, and the draft prepared by DSN-DK and IDSN was discussed at a meeting in Copenhagen in December 2013.

The ETI UK, Denmark and Norway were present along with stakeholders from the business and academic communities who gave input and discussed options for a paper to emerge as a practical tool for companies. The three ETI chapters will now work towards a final draft and achieving consensus for a joint paper supported by all ETI chapters.

Other DSN activity involved DSN Finland's work with FinnWach on a labour rights report on the company Stora

Slavery emerges at the conjunction of individual vulnerability, social exclusion and failure of rule of law. So it should be no surprise that those countries that tolerate systemic and often institutional discrimination against their citizens on spurious grounds such as caste should also be the ones with the most extensive enslavement of their citizens. Slavery is one of the cruelest manifestations of caste discrimination. Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International

Enso Inpac's two paper mills in Tamil Nadu. The report was published in September 2013 and following the release of the report the company started implementing changes. The company also invited representatives of FinnWatch and DSN-Fi to its headquarters where it indicated its aim of becoming a model enterprise in the field of preventing caste discrimination. The cooperation with FinnWatch resulted in DSN-Fi becoming a member of the organisation.

The Walk Free Foundation released the first edition of the Global Slavery Index³⁷ measuring the size of the modern day slavery problem in 162 countries in terms of the number of people living in slavery, the risk of enslavement and the robustness of government responses to the problem. Caste systems are present in four out of five countries ranked the worst slavery offenders. India alone accounts for half of the people on the planet regarded as 'modern slaves'.

The pioneering index cites caste and tribal systems as main factors influencing the prevalence of modern slavery in India, singling out Dalits and Adivasis as the most vulnerable: "Poverty and India's caste system are significant contributing factors to its modern slavery problem. Indians most vulnerable to modern slavery are those from the 'lower' castes (dalits), and the indigenous communities (adivasis), especially women and children."

The report furthermore highlights caste as a key factor in bonded labour and slavery in Nepal and Pakistan in areas such as brick making, agriculture, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. It furthermore points towards caste discrimination as a key hindrance to breaking out of slavery highlighting that denial of access to basic rights and services, such as education, health care and justice exacerbates the vulnerability of Dalits to enslavement. Throughout the year IDSN have disseminated the findings of this and other reports on modern slavery and caste discrimination to the wider IDSN network, the UN, EU and international media.