



PRESS RELEASE

Global conference urged to include 300 million excluded women

IWGIA and IDSN call on the participants in the Women Deliver Conference in Copenhagen to address discrimination against hundreds of millions of Dalit and indigenous women.

COPENHAGEN, 11 MAY 2016 --- When leaders and activists from all over the world gather in Copenhagen next week to focus on the health and human rights of girls and women, their discussions must include two large groups that suffer extreme social exclusion and marginalisation, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) said today.

The organisations work to address the respective problems of indigenous people and people subjected to caste discrimination. Together, these groups number more than 300 million women and girls, who are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination due to gender, poverty, low social status and – in the case of the Dalits – caste.

“We strongly urge the participants in the Women Deliver Conference to address the issues of Dalit and indigenous women. We implore you to include the excluded, and to avoid marginalising the marginalised even further. We see great hope in the strength and potential of this global gathering, and call on the participants to seek partnerships with hundreds of millions of women who suffer from gross violations of their most fundamental human rights and are often forced to live at the very bottom of their societies,” the two organisations said.

The UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, examined the human rights situation of indigenous women and girls in a recent report. She concluded that “indigenous women experience a broad, multifaceted and complex spectrum of mutually reinforcing human rights abuses”, stemming from different sources of discrimination and marginalisation.

The violation of the rights to self-determination, rights over land and resources as well as multiple forms of violence against indigenous women - including domestic violence, trafficking, violence in the context of conflicts, sexual violence or violence based on tradition - clearly shows their extremely vulnerable position. The report noted that violence against indigenous women is indivisibly linked to the “endemic violations of collective, civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights” and constitutes a form of structural violence.

Likewise, in a recent milestone report on caste-based discrimination, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, stressed that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to caste discrimination and “disproportionately subjected to dire human rights violations, including violence and, particularly, sexual violence, trafficking, early and/or forced marriage and harmful traditional practices.” The rapporteur observed that atrocities against women from marginalised castes are often committed when they try to assert their rights and challenge caste and gender norms. The violence that affects both groups is very often carried out with impunity.

The Special Rapporteur also listed caste discrimination as a “major cause of poverty, inequality and social exclusion” and called on states to “consider including caste-specific indicators to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets address the situation of affected groups.”

As the SDGs and their implementation are of central importance to the Women Deliver Conference, it is relevant to note that Dalit and indigenous women often face limited or no access to health care due to poverty and discrimination. The same goes for education and a number of other key areas. This lack of access condemns these groups to lag behind others – contrary to the spirit and commitment of the SDGs which are supposed to ensure that no one is left behind.

As these structural inequalities affect hundreds of millions of girls and women, it becomes even more urgent to include the plight of Dalit and indigenous women in the Women Deliver discussions, not least those that focus on

violence against women and access to justice, health, education and political participation – and to find solutions that will enable these marginalised groups to become drivers of development and powerful agents of change.

“Unless the situation of more than 300 million Dalit and indigenous women is specifically addressed as an integral part of the international development agenda, especially the discussions about women’s rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the commitment expressed by Head of States of “leaving no one behind” will be meaningless. Yet again, indigenous and Dalit women will be let down and pushed even further towards exclusion from global development efforts,” IWGIA and IDSN concluded.

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More information:

[UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues: Report on caste discrimination](#)

[Dalit women short film](#) (IDSN video)

[Dalit women](#) (key issue section on IDSN website)

[UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples: Report on Rights of Indigenous Women](#)

[IWGIA homepage on Gender related issues](#)

[Indigenous Heroines](#) (publication)

[Indigenous Women in REDD+ - Making their Voice Heard](#) (publication)

[Marginalisation and Impunity – Violence against Women and Girls](#) (publication)

Note to editors:

Caste discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Caste systems divide people into unequal and hierarchical social groups and are found in South Asia, in communities migrated from the region across the globe and in other caste-stratified countries in Africa and Asia. In South Asia, people subjected to caste discrimination are known as Dalits – and formerly as ‘untouchables’. Dalit women are subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination because of their gender, caste and low social status.

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) works on a global level for the elimination of caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent. Find more information about caste discrimination on www.idsn.org

Indigenous women often face double discrimination – as indigenous and as women. They experience gender discrimination not only from the surrounding society but often also from within their own communities. Indigenous women suffer from a range of human rights violations, including lack of participation in decision-making processes; lack of control over income to sustain themselves and their families; lack of land rights; lack of access to education; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; domestic violence; and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflicts and militarization.

As part of the general human rights principles guiding **IWGIA’s** work it promotes gender equity and mutual respect in all of its activities. The support for indigenous women’s rights and empowerment is a cross-cutting aspect in IWGIA’s activities whenever it is relevant and feasible. IWGIA seeks to integrate the issue of women’s rights and participation in key activities such as in the land and natural resource rights and capacity building/awareness raising projects. Read more on www.iwgia.org