



IDSN highlights for the 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council (13 -30 September 2016)

Caste discrimination and its consequences are addressed in several reports presented at the 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council. Below is a brief overview of reports with considerations on caste and IDSN's recommendations to member states to address the topic in selected thematic human rights dialogues.

IDSN calls on the members of the UN Human Rights Council to pay special attention to:

- 1) the nexus between caste-based discrimination and forced and bonded labour in Asia;**
- 2) the consequences of discrimination and untouchability practices in access to water and sanitation;
the human rights situation for Muhamasheen in Yemen;**
- 3) caste-based discrimination against women and girls; and**
- 4) securing inclusion of "caste" on a par with other types of discrimination in statements**

Please find [linked here](#) an IDSN overview of all references to caste in reports and statements from the current session, including the opening statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Debt Bondage and Caste

One of the highlights of the 33rd session is the presentation by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Ms. Urmila Bhoola of her thematic report ([A/HRC/33/46](#)) on debt bondage. The report illustrates how caste discrimination makes Dalits and other groups determined to be of "lower caste" particularly vulnerable to bonded labor and debt bondage. The report presents debt bondage as a prevalent issues in a number of caste affected countries including India, Pakistan and Nepal in various industries from textile mills to mining, construction and agriculture where the vast majority of bonded laborers are from minority groups such as scheduled castes and Dalits.

IDSN encourages states to voice their support for Ms. Bhoola recommendation to undertake national and regional surveys to identify victims of debt bondage and emphasize the necessity to include disaggregated data on groups affected by caste. In the same recommendation IDSN urges Member States to emphasize the importance of conducting these surveys in caste affected countries whilst sensitizing new legislation, policies and programmes to discrimination based on caste.

The Clustered Interactive Dialogue under ITEM 3 with the Special Rapporteur on Slavery is scheduled for September 15.

Caste discrimination in Yemen

In his report on the situation for human rights in Yemen ([A/HRC/33/38*](#)), the High Commissioner Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein reports on attacks on residential areas inhabited primarily by people from the Muhamasheen community.

A recent [study](#) on Yemen by Minority Rights Group showed that caste discrimination makes Muhamasheen particularly vulnerable in the present conflict and calls on the international community to step up their efforts to offer relief to minority communities.

IDSN encourages members of the Human Rights Council and donor countries to push for independent and effective investigations into targeted attacks against the Muhamasheen in Yemen.

Further recommendations and guidelines on how to address caste-based discrimination in humanitarian aid can be found in the IDSN booklet [Equality in Aid](#) from 2014.

The General Debate on ITEM 10, including reports by the UN Secretary General and UN High Commissioner on Human Rights on Cambodia and Yemen, is scheduled for September 28.

Gender and Caste

In connection with the annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective, IDSN further wishes to bring attention to the issue of caste as one of the crucial factors that results in multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against certain groups of women. Most recently the issue was highlighted by the special rapporteur on minority issues in her thematic report to the 31st session ([A/HRC/31/56](#)). 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 women in the group is very often carried out with impunity. Thus it is paramount that caste is considered for further analysis and integration of a gender perspective into the work of the Human Rights Council and its Subsidiary Bodies, as well as in the implementation of gender-related resolutions on the national level.

The annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms is scheduled to take place on September 26th from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Other core documents on caste and UN human rights mechanisms:

- [Report](#) by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues on minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status ([A/HRC/31/56](#))
- IDSN [Compilation](#) on UN references to caste discrimination
- United Nations [Principles and Guidelines](#) for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent