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To the MEPs signatories of the letter addressed to me on 29 June as regards serious human rights violations and persistent development challenges linked to caste discrimination

Dear Colleagues,

I would hereby like to thank you for your very useful and practical suggestions on how to ensure that EU actions better address caste-based discrimination. I would also take this opportunity to thank you for the fruitful debate that took place in the European Parliament on 6 July following my presentation of the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy.

Non-discrimination and equality are cross-cutting principles in international human rights law and are fundamental principles on which the EU is founded. It is on this basis the EU operates to eliminate all forms of discriminations, both within our own borders and in the world. Additionally, the very same principles guide humanitarian aid provided by the EU. According to the Council regulation¹ on humanitarian aid, assistance, and relief protection operations should be carried out on a non-discriminatory basis to help people in third countries, and particularly the most vulnerable amongst them, who are victims of disasters and crisis.

I would like to emphasise that the EU works systematically in multilateral fora and in particular with the United Nations on eliminating discrimination. This includes efforts to integrate the findings and recommendations of the UN Human Rights system into EU bilateral cooperation and dialogue, as well as in support given to civil society through thematic programmes, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Global Public Good and Challenges. This year's EIDHR global call for proposal addresses notably the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those affected by caste-based discrimination. We look forward to the publication of the UN Guidance Tool on Discrimination based on Work and Descent that will definitely provide guidance in our future efforts.

The Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies now take into account discrimination based on caste. The EU pays particular attention to discrimination based on caste in the analysis of the human rights situations in individual partner countries. These analyses also take into account the complexities of multiple or intersectional discrimination and are essential to the human rights and policy dialogues conducted with our partner countries, as well as in identifying and implementing our cooperation activities.

¹ (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996

In the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019, the EU took a number of decisions to invigorate EU's support for Human Rights Defenders working to promote social, economic and cultural rights both, at country and multilateral levels. We intend pay particular attention to Human Rights Defenders advocating for inter alia women's rights, labour rights and for the rights and inclusion of persons belonging to most marginalized groups. This is reflected in the support provided under the EIDHR. The Action Plan also foresees enhanced attention to the threats to civil society space and in protecting and promoting the freedoms of expression and assembly.

In the area of humanitarian aid, the EU fully subscribes to the recommendation of the 2013 International Dalit Solidarity Network report on Equality in Aid: Addressing caste discrimination in humanitarian response. Humanitarian partners wishing to engage in EU-funded actions in South Asia, the region where caste-based discrimination is most prevalent, are required to properly and systematically address in all projects and sectors the inclusion of marginalised groups, among others Dalits. In addition, one of the European Commission's guiding principles in its Disaster Risk Reduction policy, is the promotion of full participation of marginalised groups, including engaging with stakeholders, as actors of change, at all levels, international, national and local.

Finally, in May 2014, the European Commission adopted a rights-based approach to development cooperation (RBA), encompassing all human rights. Non-discrimination and equal access are among the five working principles of the RBA, ensuring that EU development cooperation does not exacerbate discrimination and contributes to respecting the rights of the most vulnerable and discriminated. The EU has started preparing a toolkit on anti-discrimination, which will complement existing guidance on the RBA. The latter will be essential for EU actions in contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its pledge to leave no one behind.

I can assure you that both, European External Action Service and the European Commission will continue cooperation in our shared commitments to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini