

International Dalit Solidarity Network and Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement

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I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement and the International Dalit Solidarity Network.

Dalit women and girls in Bangladesh face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the grounds of their caste, gender and socioeconomic status. To effectively address the root causes of discrimination based on caste we request the committee and the government to pay special attention in the following areas of concern.

There is a strong need for disaggregated data especially on caste and gender in Bangladesh. The lack of statistics on Dalits constitute a major obstacle for the consideration and inclusion of Dalit women in policies and programmes aimed at ensuring women's access to the basic entitlements that the government has set aside for Dalits. Several public universities have introduced quotas for Dalits, however, the lack of data prevent government officials from providing Dalits with the necessary certificates to document their claims to this right.

There is a lack of political measures to ensure the participation of Dalit women in public and political life in Bangladesh. Though the national parliament has the provision to reserve 50 seats for women there are currently no Dalit women members of parliament.

Bangladesh has no legal provisions giving attention to Dalit and minority women. The 'Anti-discrimination Act' proposed by the Law Commission in 2014 specifically address the issue of caste based discrimination and is currently under review by the Ministry of Law. To effectively protect the rights of Dalit women the government must ensure the enactment of the proposed Anti-Discrimination Act and review the National Women Development Policy from 2011 to include the special needs of Dalit women and girls.

Access to quality education is a big issue for Dalit women. Although, Bangladesh has made considerable advancements regarding enrollment rates in primary education, Dalit girls are lacking behind as they face harassment in schools on the grounds of their assigned caste status. The government should introduce special measures to address the high drop-out rates among Dalits and improve accessibility and safe access to schools for Dalit children and for Dalit girls in particular. Untouchability practices lead to discrimination against Dalit women in the workplace and has severe implications for maternal health. Furthermore, Dalit women have limited access to basic services such as water and sanitation for the Dalit community in Bangladesh.

Caste based discrimination is a direct cause of inequality and poverty in Bangladesh especially for the women who are affected by this form of discrimination. In the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Bangladeshi government should consider including caste-specific indicators and take special measure to consider the disparity between Dalits and other groups in society.

I thank you for your attention