

These children in Nepal practice earthquake procedures. Following the 2015 Nepal earthquake IDS^N distributed information on caste discrimination in relief efforts to key humanitarian stakeholders including EU officials and MEPs. In June, the European Parliament adopted an Urgency Resolution raising concern over caste discrimination hampering aid efforts in Nepal. Photo by Jim Holmes/AusAID - [Creative Commons](#).



European Union

In 2015, the European Parliament adopted several resolutions with clauses on caste discrimination and strong recommendations for speeding up EU action to fight this form of discrimination. Encouragingly, the EU has started mentioning “caste” alongside other grounds of discrimination, and Action Plans for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) integrate the rights of persons affected by caste-based discrimination as a cross-cutting concern. IDS^N was invited for formal exchanges with the EU Human Rights Working Group (COHOM) and the European External Action Service in June. Through the year, IDS^N made submissions, shared briefing notes and new information on caste discrimination with EU officials and members of the European Parliament.

EU advocacy, dialogue and input

The year offered several excellent opportunities for dialogue and input to EU institutions and processes. Importantly, the EU revised its [Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan](#)⁴⁴ to which IDS^N submitted recommendations. Despite the relevance, caste discrimination was not among the thematic priorities of this human rights agenda, which commits EU institutions and member states to deliver on human rights as “the silver thread running through all EU policies and actions”. However, the development of an “EU Handbook on Anti-discrimination” with tools for anti-discrimination measures against all forms of discrimination, including multiple discrimination, may be among the practical means for the EU to focus explicitly on caste.

IDS^N staff and members met with EU officials and MEPs in Brussels on several occasions and maintained regular communication. Many EU officials and MEPs receive IDS^N's newsletter and targeted information.

In April, letters were addressed to EU high-level officials, i.e. the High Representative for Foreign Relations, Federica Mogherini, Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, and EEAS Director for Human Rights and Democracy Silvio Gonzato, reiterating IDS^N's call for an EU policy on the elimination of caste-based discrimination, and high level EU public diplomacy on the issue.

IDS^N also provided submissions and briefings related to caste, human rights and development in country situations, including a submission on Bangladesh to the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) staff and an EP delegation, before their visit to the country. IDS^N furthermore facilitated information and recommendations on caste related issues for the Universal Periodic Review of Nepal in November.

Briefing papers shared with EU officials and MEPs include

IDS^N recommendations for relevant inter-active dialogues of the Human Rights Council sessions; IDS^N submissions to UN human rights bodies, e.g. to the Commission on the Status of Women on the situation of Dalit women; and the [report](#)⁴⁵ from the OHCHR backed IDS^N side-event on Caste- and gender-based forced and bonded labour held at the 29th session of the Human Rights Council. IDS^N also shared information on the Nepal earthquake disaster and caste discrimination in relief to MEPs and EU officials, including EU's humanitarian arm ECHO, who took a considerable interest in the topic.

On 16 June, IDS^N had [exchanges](#)⁴⁶ with the EU Human Rights Working Group (COHOM) of the Council of the EU and the European External Action Service. IDS^N board members and the Executive Director presented current thematic challenges and recommendations, urging the adoption of an EU policy on the prevention and elimination of caste-based discrimination, EU high-level public diplomacy on caste-based discrimination and support to initiatives at the multilateral level. EU officials noted issues related to the exclusion of caste in the process leading to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Universal Period Review of Nepal and call for non-discrimination in relief and reconstruction in Nepal. Country situations were presented by Paul Divakar (NCDHR, India), Manjula Pradeep (Navsarjan Trust, India), Durga Sob (FEDO, Nepal) and Sandra Petersen (IDS^N-Norway) on behalf of Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network.

On several occasions, the IDS^N Executive Director met EU officials and member state representatives in New York to discuss support of IDS^N's stalled [application for ECOSOC accreditation](#)⁴⁷.

In September, the EU delegation in New York hosted a meeting for EU member states with civil society representatives and parliamentarians from South Asia. The meeting, prompted by the Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, addressed concerns over leaving out Dalits and other caste-affected people from the world's foremost considerations on reducing inequalities.

EIDHR - Increased focus on caste

Over the past years, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) funding for civil society action to eliminate caste discrimination has been considerable. It has paved the way for innovative projects and approaches, and included support to regional activities.

The 2015 EIDHR Action Plan integrated the rights of persons affected by caste-based discrimination as a cross-cutting concern. It made specific mention of persons affected by caste discrimination in action documents on support to civil society; in its actions to support protection and promotion of human rights, human rights defenders, universities for

aimed at directing action for the elimination of caste-based discrimination and to include policy objectives on caste-based discrimination in its new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

In June, a European Parliament [urgency resolution](#)⁵⁰ on the situation in Nepal after the earthquake raised concern over caste discrimination inhibiting the aid efforts.

On 17 December 2015, the European Parliament adopted [resolution \(2015/2229\(INI\)\)](#)⁵¹ on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014. The parliament took note of its resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste discrimination; and condemned in the strongest terms all forms of discrimination, including those based on caste. The Parliament urged the EU to intensify its efforts to eradicate all types of discrimination, through human rights and political dialogue, the work of the EU Delegations and public diplomacy.

Specifically, the Parliament notes “with great concern the scale and consequences of caste-based discrimination and recommends the mainstreaming of the topic in the EEAS and Commission guidelines and action plans, in particular in the EU fight against all forms of discrimination, and in efforts to combat violence against women and girls and all forms of discrimination against them”.

As a member of the Brussels-based Human Rights and Development Network (HRDN), IDS^N supported the network's campaign on Human Rights Defenders and call for stronger EU leadership on human rights. The HRDN Troika meet occasionally with COHOM; in a December briefing the Troika with a point of departure in the principle of the SDGs - “No one left behind” – stated “the need to address the rights of people, who are most severely discriminated against – 260 million caste-affected people – and noted IDS^N's call for “promotion of supportive initiatives at multilateral level and for mainstreaming of the issue as part of the EU's pledge to fight all forms of discrimination”.

Encouragingly, EU made several statements at the UN, pointing to, inter alia, its concern of “repeated efforts by some to undermine the principle of universality with cultural relativism,” and noting that human rights protection is not afforded to groups, beliefs or ideologies but to human beings – whatever their race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, caste or migration status”.

human rights and democracy postgraduate education and in supporting key international actors, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the course of the year, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights released several global calls for proposals relevant for organisations working at the grassroots level for Dalit rights.

The commitment of the EU institutions to integrate caste-based discrimination and people affected by caste discrimination is noteworthy and reflected in the EIDHR Action documents for supporting human rights priorities and Global Calls 2016-2017. The documents address a number of key issues of caste-affected people and outlines a range of actions, that can be pursued under the priorities for EIDHR global calls.

European Parliament

Over the course of the year, several MEPs, including former Finnish Minister of Development Heidi Hautala, posed [questions](#)⁴⁸ on caste discrimination to Commissioners and challenged follow up to the resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste discrimination. IDS^N maintained contact and submitted input to MEPs across political groups.

On 12 March 2015, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the [Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2013](#)⁴⁹. For the first time, a separate section on caste-based discrimination was included in the annual resolution, calling for the EU to adopt a policy