

This Dalit woman paid a high price for refusing to vacate her land when a dominant caste wanted to take it from her. One night she was captured, stripped naked, beaten, slashed with a knife under both eyes and left for dead. She was found and later reported the assault to the police. Ten years later the case was still pending. In 2017 the EU Annual Report on Human Rights raised concern over caste discrimination, access to justice for Dalits, and violence against Dalit women. A joint letter was released by MEPs to urge the issue of caste to be addressed at the 2017 EU-India summit. Photo by Jakob Carlsen

European Union

In 2017, IDS^N continued to conduct outreach with EU institutions including representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission and Members of the European Parliament (EP). As in previous years, caste discrimination was featured in important EU initiatives and resolutions throughout the year.

In a [declaration](#) by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, caste was identified as one of the many forms of discrimination that men, women and children worldwide continue to suffer from.

In February an IDS^N delegation took part in meetings with the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and with the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), where opportunities for increased cooperation were explored.

An IDS^N delegation also visited Brussels in June and held meetings with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) and key Members of the European Parliaments and assistants to inform them of developments in caste-affected countries and look to future avenues for engagement.

MEP open letter ahead of EU-India Summit

On 6th October, India hosted the EU-India Summit in New Delhi. Ahead of this high-level meeting, a cross-party group of prominent Members of the European Parliament (MEP) sent an [open letter](#) to the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, urging them to address both publicly and privately the EU's concerns with regards to caste discrimination.

Amongst other recommendations, parliamentarians called on EU leaders to urge the Indian government to take immediate steps to eliminate abuses against Dalits and provide concrete plans to implement laws and government policies to secure their protection.

“We remain deeply concerned with the serious human rights violations and persistent development challenges linked to caste discrimination. At least 260 million people around the globe face appalling and dehumanising discrimination based on caste and similar systems of inherited status.”

Excerpt from cross-party MEP letter to EU leaders ahead of EU-India Summit

Capacity building workshop on EU advocacy

IDS^N organized and facilitated a capacity building workshop ‘Making international institutions and mechanisms work for you’ on 10 October (see also pg. 15). The workshop included an overview of the EU and its institutions by IDS^N's EU Adviser. EU Human rights policy was also explored along with the avenues available for advocacy on caste discrimination at the EU level. In the margins of the workshop, an IDS^N delegation accompanied by Dalit representatives met with Veronica Cody, the new EU Ambassador to Nepal.

EU annual report highlights concern over caste discrimination

Also in October, EU Foreign ministers adopted the EU [Annual Report](#) on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2016. The report provides an annual overview of the EU's human rights efforts towards third countries. Two chapters, on Nepal and India, specifically highlight concern with regards to Dalits.

“In 2016, the cancellation of many CSOs' licenses under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act became prominent in the discussion of civil society space. Moreover, acts of discrimination against Dalits and violence against women continue to persist in the country despite government efforts.”

EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, India Chapter

“There are regular reports of domestic violence, dowry killings, rape, child marriages, traditional harmful practices and other gender-based violence. Long-standing prejudices hamper effective access to justice. Some groups, e.g. female Dalits, women with disabilities, and human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable.”

EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, Nepal Chapter



Dalit activists at EU NGO Forum

On 5-6 December, Dalit human rights defenders formed part of an IDSN delegation to the 19th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum that took place in Brussels. The theme of the forum was "Human rights under threat: Exploring new approaches in a challenging global context."

The Forum was organised by the European Union's External Action Service and the European Commission together with the NGO umbrella Human Rights Democracy Network (HRDN), of which IDSN is a member. At the Forum, Dalit defenders participated in discussions on how to ensure more action to fight caste discrimination, particularly at the EU level.

Among recommendations put forward were the need for the EU to ensure that caste discrimination is addressed in all bilateral dealings with caste-affected countries and for EU member states to raise the issue of caste-related human rights violations at the United Nations. Ankita, representing the Feminist Dalit Organisation – Nepal, also discussed the multiple discrimination faced by Dalit women in caste-affected countries and continued discrimination in Nepal.

IDSN nominated Sushil BK of the Dalit NGO Federation and he was chosen by the EEAS as a key participant. He raised the issue of Dalits facing ongoing exclusion from civil, political, cultural and economic rights, despite some positive changes to the constitution.

European Parliament's annual rights report

In December, The European Parliament's 'Annual Report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter', was also adopted. The [report](#) contained a number of references to caste discrimination.

MEPs repeated their calling for the development of an EU policy on caste discrimination and urged the EU and its member states to intensify efforts and support related initiatives at UN and delegation level by 'implementing and monitoring the 2030 SDGs, monitoring the new UN Guidance Tool on descent-based discrimination and supporting states' implementation of recommendations by UN human rights mechanisms on the topic of caste discrimination'.

"Condemns the continuing human rights violations committed against people suffering as a result of caste hierarchies and caste-based discrimination, including the denial of equality and access to the legal system and employment, continued segregation and caste-induced barriers to the achievement of basic human rights and development and similar systems of inherited status." European Parliament's 'Annual Report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter'
