

Madame Michele Bachelet Jeria

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Palais Wilson

52 rue des Pâquis

CH-1201 Geneva

Switzerland.

Madame High Commissioner,

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSN is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe, and national platforms in caste-affected countries. We engage with the UN, the EU and other multilateral institutions do address “untouchability” and other abuses faced by Dalits and similar communities that suffer discrimination on the basis of work and descent, with an important gender component.

We warmly welcome your nomination by the Secretary-General, with your subsequent holding in office as the head of the OHCHR.

We renew our hopes in the multilateral human rights mechanisms despite the current challenges facing human rights worldwide, particularly by the rise of scepticism fuelled by discourses of hate, intolerance and discrediting of the global human rights achievements since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We are cognizant of the challenges ahead of the mission you now undertake, including to give voice to survivors of oppression, to silenced human rights defenders and to remove a number of groups from invisibility, both domestically and internationally. Discrimination based on work and descent, though prohibited in many countries has produced abhorrent practices, such as untouchability, denying over 260 million people their inherent dignity and respect. Dalit women and girls are particularly targeted. The Special Rapporteur on Violence against

Women in 2014 highlighted that “The reality of Dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalisation ... They are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence. They are often displaced; pushed into forced and/or bonded labour, prostitution and trafficking.” Civil society or individuals advocating for their cause are often subject to threats, intimidation, defamation or reprisals. The voices of these advocates are also silenced at the international level, undermining equal participation in the relevant fora.

Despite those challenges, it is time for renewed hope and enthusiasm, as we trust in role of leadership in defence of a strong international human rights system based on standards, and of a continued mainstreaming of human rights within the UN system itself.

We stand ready to support your mandate and your office in fulfilment of your essential mandate.

With assurances of our highest consideration,



Meena Varma
EXECUTIVE CHAIR of the Board

International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)
Farvergade 27D, 1. floor
DK-1463 Copenhagen K
Denmark
Tel: +45 60433432,
E-mail: chair@idsn.org