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Statement by International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA)

[International Dalit Solidarity Network](#) (IDSN) and [Asia Floor Wage Alliance](#) (AFWA) echo the call by [National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights](#) (NCDHR) and Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labour Union (TTCU) on garment brands to negotiate a binding agreement to end systemic gender-based violence that leverages caste discrimination at H&M supplier factory Natchi Apparels (SF. No:470/2 Kaithayan Kottai, Veda sandur 624711, Dindigul), after a 21-year-old Dalit garment worker was murdered by her dominant caste factory supervisor earlier this year.

Gender-based violence, amplified by unchecked caste-based discrimination in the workplace ultimately led to the murder of Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labour Union (TTCU) member and quality checker Jeyasre Kathiravel by her direct supervisor at Natchi Apparels, Thangadurai on January 1, 2021. Sadly, as reported by TTCU and the [Guardian](#), Jeyasre's case was not an isolated incident. Multiple women workers, the majority of whom are Dalits, reported sexual assault, harassment and verbal abuse by male supervisors and managerial staff, who are almost entirely from dominant caste groups. The conditions in this factory show the lethal consequences of intersectional caste and gender-based discrimination.

The garment industry in Tamil Nadu disproportionately relies on Dalit women in their workforce for cheap and coerced labour. Suppliers tap into the marginalization of Dalit communities to pay low wages and push workers to meet the high production targets demanded by big brands. The modern garment sector and fashion brands reap huge profit from these caste-based inequalities in garment factories in caste affected countries like India, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

Due to the systemic nature of caste discrimination in caste-affected countries like India, unless specific enforceable mechanisms are put in place to proactively counter caste-based discrimination and advance decent work for all, Dalit workers in garment factories will face specific risks of violence and harassment, linked to their caste status. [Previous research](#) by IDSN has shown that audits in garment factories rarely uncover workers affected by caste and auditors and reviewers employed by companies are often unaware of the issue, making it impossible to detect.

While we are heartened to know that Jeyasre's family has reached a mutual agreement on compensation, we believe that brands must continue to work to curb gender and caste-based discrimination and violence at Natchi Apparels by taking the following steps:

- Take action to end any and all coercion or retaliation against workers and community members who speak out, attempt to improve conditions in the workplace, report abuse or join TTCU.
- Partner with the TTCU which is a Dalit women led trade union, to create and implement a long-term solution to gender and caste-based discrimination in the form of a binding and enforceable agreement including freedom of association for all workers.

- Educate all staff on intersectional gender and caste-based discrimination and use the [Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code Guidance on Caste in Global Supply Chains](#) to start taking action to end this discrimination.
- Ensure caste and gender diversity in the workforce at all levels and include Dalit women in shaping policies to address caste and gender discrimination and in the implementation of these policies.