



WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

A close-up, warm-toned photograph of a young woman with dark skin, brown eyes, and a wide, joyful smile. She has long, dark hair styled in two braids. A cluster of small, delicate purple flowers is tucked behind her left ear. She is wearing a vibrant orange sari with a subtle texture and a beaded necklace. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

2020  
annual report



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## Caste discrimination

There are an estimated 260 million Dalits worldwide, often born into an 'untouchable' status, in highly stratified caste systems. Caste systems are found in South Asia, in communities migrated from South Asia across the globe and in other caste-stratified countries in Africa and Asia.

Caste-based discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Caste systems divide people into unequal and hierarchical social groups. Those at the bottom are

considered inferior, 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups. Those in the lowest of castes, known as Dalits in South Asia, are often considered 'untouchable' and subjected to so-called 'untouchability practices' in both public and private spheres. Dalits may be forced to do the most dirty and hazardous jobs, and subjected to modern slavery.

Due to exclusionary practices, Dalits have limited access to resources, services and development, keeping many in severe poverty.

Dalits are often de facto excluded from decision-making and meaningful participation in public and civil life. Lack of special legislation banning caste-based discrimination or lack of implementation of legislation, due to dysfunctional systems of justice, lack of state responsibility and caste-bias, have largely left Dalits without protection.

Despite policy development and new legislation in some countries, fundamental challenges still remain in all caste-affected countries.

Cover photo of a Dalit girl in India by Sean Hawkey ©

Inner cover photo of Dalit students in Pakistan by Jakob Carlsen/IDSN ©



Young Dalit women in Bangladesh. Photo by Abir Abdullah ©

## 2020 Highlights

- Caste-hate speech raised by IDSN at the 2020 UN Minority Forum and EU NGO Human Rights Forum
- UN CEDAW committee raises concern over caste and gender discrimination in Pakistan
- UN Human Rights Chief and EU Delegation condemn Dalit killings in Nepal
- European Parliament calls for an EU policy to address caste discrimination
- EU Special Representative for Human Rights meets with Dalit women activists
- IDSN launches statements and awareness raising to address caste and Covid-19
- Over 40,000 view IDSN live debate on love, caste and colourism
- OHCHR webinar “When language excludes and discriminates” co-organised by IDSN
- Caste, slavery and labour rights raised at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights
- Ethical Trade Norway seminar held on the need to tackle caste in global supply chains

## Foreword

**Dear friends and supporters of the International Dalit Solidarity Network,**

Not since 1918 – more than 100 years ago - has the world witnessed a global pandemic so severe that it has cost the lives of millions and forced most of the world into strict lockdown measures. 2020 was a year unlike any that had gone before.

The global crisis precipitated by COVID-19 has shown more than ever how the most marginalised and excluded communities across the globe have suffered disproportionately and the need to address and highlight incidences of oppression, violence and abuse at the international level is key. There is still so much to be done.

We hope to show you in this 2020 Annual Report, that we have worked tirelessly throughout the year to ensure international attention is brought to caste discrimination around the world.

We have continued to focus on our three main thematic objectives – Dalit Women and Gender Justice; Business and Human Rights; Equality and Participation. You will see a new format for this year's Review as we have highlighted our successes (and challenges) under these headings.

And we have had a good deal of success, lobbying UN and EU leaders nationally and internationally, as well as helping multinationals working in the Indian subcontinent to acknowledge their responsibility to help tackle caste discrimination in their supply chains.

Moreover we have shown that language matters, and that the global terminology of 'social distancing' only serves to exacerbate notions of 'purity vs pollution' and entrenches 'untouchability' practices that heighten discrimination. We can be social and distanced – what the world needs is to be 'safe'.

Special thanks should go to the IDSN Board and Secretariat who have worked tirelessly over the past year to ensure ending caste discrimination remains high on the human rights agenda and to reiterate that #DalitLivesMatter.

IDSN would not be the force it is today without all of us in the network. The struggles in all the areas we work in will not go away any time soon - but with your ongoing passion and support, we can at least try to lessen the worst impacts, heighten and amplify the voices from the ground and above all continue to work together.

Thank you all for the hard work, commitment and dedication you have shown to this cause and to IDSN during 2020 and I very much look forward to better times in the year to come and beyond.

**Meena Varma**

Executive Director - IDSN

# Dalit Women and Gender Justice

The intersection of caste and gender discrimination has been a key focus in IDSН's work in 2020. Caste-affected countries such as India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh remain deeply patriarchal societies where women are often oppressed and socially restrained from accessing the same rights, services and privileges. Intersectional caste and gender discrimination leaves Dalit women and girls as some of the furthest behind when it comes to achieving the UN Global Goals.

In 2020, cases of caste-based violence, rape, slavery and discrimination in education, labour and access to health and services have shown the need to challenge injustices and take action to actively promote caste and gender justice is greater than ever.

Dalit women are leading the way by standing up for their rights and are forming movements and campaigns across the world, growing stronger every day. In 2020, IDSН has worked to amplify the voices of Dalit women activists in the IDSН network and beyond and to facilitate access to, and impact on, international level platforms, to ensure that caste and gender justice is on the international human rights agenda. Here we share some of the key highlights of our work on Dalit women and gender justice in 2020.

## UN women's committee raises concern over caste and gender discrimination in Pakistan

In January 2020, IDSН submitted a [report](#) detailing the challenges faced by Dalit women and girls in Pakistan, for the review of the government's report on compliance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

IDSН documented cases of modern slavery affecting Dalits in Pakistan; forced marriages and forced conversions of Dalit women and girls, including frequent reports that the victims are kidnapped and subjugated to physical and emotional abuse.

During the review, a number of Committee members inquired about the enforcement of the legislation prohibiting forced marriages and conversion, but the Pakistan delegation did not provide concrete data on its implementation. In the [Concluding Observations](#) of the review of Pakistan the Committee recommended that the state address intersecting discrimination directly and noted concern over the persistence of abductions and forced conversions, stereotypes and insufficient disaggregated data.

IDSН also provided support to Dalit human rights defenders ahead of the CEDAW review, participating in the preparatory meetings and providing strategic support during the dialogue with the State Delegation.

## UN Human Rights Chief and EU Delegation condemn Dalit killings in Nepal

In May 2020, IDSН approached UN and EU officials with details of several cases of rape and killings of Dalits in Nepal, as gathered by IDSН members. The cases included the rape and murder of a 12-year old Dalit girl by a dominant caste man as well as the "Rukum" case, where four Dalit men were killed due to intercaste love between one of the men and a dominant caste girl.

On 29 May, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, issued a [statement](#) condemning these killings and calling for independent investigations and swift action. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nepal, Valerie Julliand, also made several statements on Twitter on the killings.

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**"Caste-based discrimination remains widespread, not only in Nepal but other countries, and often leads to serious harm and, as in this case, even loss of life. Ending caste-based discrimination is fundamental to the sustainable development vision of leaving no one behind."**

Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Statement 29 May 2020

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## Netflix, caste and colourism

### Over 40,000 view IDSN debate on love, caste and colourism

On 20 August, IDSN facilitated the [livecast discussion](#) "Caste and Colourism: Challenging the Standards for Love in Biased Societies", with the Executive Producer of Netflix's Indian Matchmaking show, Smriti Mundhra; International Dalit Solidarity Network Director, Meena Varma; Director of Equality Labs, Thenmozhi Soundarajan and activist Christina Dhanaraj who has authored "Swipe me left, I'm Dalit" from the book "Love is not a Word".

The discussion struck a chord with many and centred around a critique by IDSN and Dalit activists that the Netflix show sweeps casteism and colourism under the rug, by implying, but never addressing the issues directly or explicitly. The show's one-sided focus on mainly Hindu dominant caste participants and their matchmaking processes, where filters such as "community" (often code for caste) and "fair skin colour" are used to find desirable matches, are seen to perpetuate social structures where caste and colour dominate without questioning the practice in the process.

The incredibly rich debate with key insights offered by Dalit women activists was moderated by Mahdis Keshavarz, founder of the The Make Agency. The recording has been viewed over 40,000 times, and has over 300 comments and 300 shares on the IDSN Facebook page and is available to [watch](#) on IDSN's Facebook page, the IDSN website and the IDSN YouTube channel.

A [joint statement](#) by the EU Delegation and EU Member States represented in Nepal was issued on 3 June, condemning violence based on caste and expressing the EU's support for efforts undertaken to conduct a fair investigation, leading to action to ensure justice and reparations for the victims and their families.

**"The EU remains committed to support the efforts of the Government of Nepal to ensure full elimination of caste-based discrimination and the full implementation of the constitutional guarantees. We call for the full force of the law to be brought against those perpetrating such crimes and discrimination."**

Joint statement by the EU Delegation and EU Member States represented in Nepal

The statement was covered in the national press in Nepal and the EU Ambassador to Nepal, Veronica Cody, also [tweeted](#) condemning such caste-based acts of violence and standing together with those calling for justice.

### Dalit women activists highlight caste and gender discrimination at UN hearing

On 21 July, intersectional caste and gender discrimination and the need to transform mindsets through human rights education and awareness raising, was highlighted by IDSN members at the UN multi-stakeholder hearing, Beijing+25 'Accelerating the Realization of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls'.

Dalit women activists from India and Nepal took part in the hearing aimed at taking stock of the outcomes and recommendations of the 25-year review processes. IDSN International Associate, The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), facilitated the participation of several Dalit women activists from IDSN member organisations.

Judith Anne, of the National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ-NCDHR) spoke at the hearing, highlighting the need for increased awareness of human rights at all levels of society.

**"Change is possible when we have a feminist transformative agenda and work with the young girls and boys through the education system in building human rights perspective, addressing diversity, inculcating gender neutral life skill training for all children in school syllabus to order to counter barriers posed by gender stereotypes, castes and other minority issues."**

Judith Anne, National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDM)-NCDHR), speaking at the UN hearing

She also spoke up about the rising cases of gender and caste-based violence in India during the Covid-19 lockdown period, underscoring the discriminatory and patriarchal mindset in her society.

Dalit women activists Aachal Sijapati and Sabitri B K, from the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) in Nepal, also participated in the hearing and reflected on some of the take-aways.

**"Gender equality is not a woman's issue but a human issue', is my biggest learning from the event... I believe this platform will definitely help me in contributing to work for gender equality and equal rights and opportunities for Dalit and marginalised girls and young women."**

Aachal Sijapati, Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) speaking at the UN hearing

The President of the General Assembly subsequently prepared and circulated a summary of the hearing prior to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly. A comprehensive [report](#) on the status of Dalit women in Nepal was also released by IDSN member FEDO and submitted to UN Women ahead of the Commission on the Status of Women Beijing +25: Realizing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls consultation, with support from IDSN and Womankind.

## IDSN issues statement on rape of Dalit women and impunity

On 7 October, IDSN issued a statement on the gang-rape and murder of a 19-year old Dalit woman in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, India. In the statement, IDSN highlighted the ongoing brutality against Dalit women and the impunity with which it is administered. IDSN also raised similar cases in India and Nepal that had also occurred within the past months, but was not as widely documented by the media.

In the case from Hathras, the police were caught on video burning the woman's dead body against the families wishes, thereby destroying evidence. There have been many other instances of rape and violence against Dalit women, but the cases are not registered due to intimidation, discrimination, threats and the failure of systems of justice.

**"The failure to ensure access to justice for Dalits in India and Nepal and take solid action to end caste-based discrimination is fuelling the most brutal and horrific crimes, with little or no consequence for the dominant caste perpetrators ... We must seize this moment to move away from talking about laws on paper and demand accountability for the implementation of those laws on the ground."**

IDSN Statement October 7, 2020

IDSN also signed on to joint letters on individual cases and advocated for action from UN and EU stakeholders to stand in solidarity with Dalit human rights defenders fighting for justice. The statement was circulated widely through the IDSN network and press contacts.

## EU Special Representative for Human Rights discusses caste violence with Dalit women activists

In November, EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore and India and Nepal desk representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS) met with IDSN and Dalit women activists from the Feminist Dalit Organisation – Nepal (FEDO) and All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM) in India, to discuss caste-based violence against Dalit women in their respective countries.



Dalit women in Nepal. Photo by Jakob Carlsen/IDSN ©

At the meeting Mr. Gilmore showed concern over the impact of Covid-19, the increase of cases of violence against Dalit women and the lack of implementation of laws meant to prevent atrocities against Dalits in India and Nepal. Mr. Gilmore assured the delegation that discrimination and violence against Dalit women will continue to be part of the agenda in the EU's engagement and dialogue with both governments and more efforts would be needed to ensure that these issues could be addressed thoroughly. He noted the importance of the concrete and verified information provided by IDSN.

The IDSN EU advocacy consultant followed up on key points with key EU bodies, delegations and working groups. As a result, IDSN was also granted meetings with the EU Ambassador to Nepal and the human rights focal point at the EU delegation in India.

### **IDSN urges states to address caste and gender justice at the UN Human Rights Council**

IDSN highlighted the need for action to address caste and gender justice under the different topics on the programme of each Human Rights Council session.

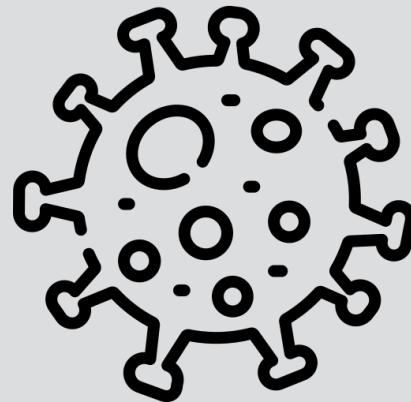
At the [43rd session](#), under the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of

children, IDSN highlighted the vulnerability of Dalit girls and women and recommended concrete actions to be taken by caste-affected states. At the [44th session](#), under the topic of women's human rights in the changing world of work – Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, IDSN highlighted how intersectional caste and gender discrimination was a key cause of Dalit women being engaged in both forced and bonded labour, as well as discrimination in hiring, positions and pay. IDSN recommended states participate in the interactive dialogue with the Working Group and raise the need to address intersectional caste and gender discrimination under targeted schemes. The recommendations were reiterated at the [45th session](#), in relation to the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

### **IDSN promotes campaigns, research and initiatives on caste and gender justice**

IDSN has promoted reports, statements, campaigns and initiatives through the IDSN website, newsletter and social media channels to amplify and strengthen voices and spread increased global awareness of the issues faced by Dalit women. IDSN channels continue to grow in reach and are an important platform for exchanges between national and global level action. Views of the IDSN [video](#) on Dalit women also rose by 25% in 2020 to 209,000 views.

# Caste and Covid-19



## Addressing caste and Covid-19

At IDSN, as in most organisations across the world, 2020 was marked by the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

All IDSN members in South Asia are engaged in supporting Dalit communities through the crisis within their areas of expertise. Some are providing relief materials and humanitarian assistance to individuals and families who have lost their income overnight, some are raising awareness and providing protective equipment, and all are advocating for Government attention and support to Dalits who are struggling to cope. IDSN has rounded up many of their initiatives in 2020 on a dedicated [Covid-19 page](#) on the IDSN website.

IDSN addressed the impact of Covid-19 in advocacy work throughout the year, participated in dozens of webinars on the topic and issued three Covid-19 specific key statements, promoted through the IDSN channels and circulated to UN and EU officials as well as co-writing an opinion piece for Thomson Reuters.

### IDSN STATEMENT – 27 MARCH 2020

#### Saving lives by preventing discrimination in Covid-19 relief

"As Covid-19 sweeps across the world it is crucial that we ensure that relief, health services and awareness raising efforts are inclusive and accessible to all irrespective of caste, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or other factors. While time is of the essence in the response to Covid-19, taking a moment to ensure that high risk communities such as Dalits are included and addressed in global, national and local responses to Covid-19, can save millions of lives." This IDSN [statement](#) outlines eight key factors that make Dalits a particularly high-risk group and offers eight key recommendations.

### IDSN STATEMENT – 3 APRIL

#### Vulnerable workers in supply chains need urgent protection to survive impact of Covid-19

IDSN strongly urged governments and companies with supply chains in South Asia to take measures to urgently protect migrant and informal workers, including Dalits, against a loss of income, social benefits, shelter and a means to feed themselves and their families, as Covid-19 measures and repercussions threaten their lives and livelihoods. The [statement](#) also offered key recommendations for Governments and companies sourcing from caste-affected countries.

### JOINT OP-ED IN THOMSON REUTERS – 27 APRIL

#### Opinion: Covid-19 poses new risks to India's enslaved waste pickers

Indian waste pickers have been struggling to obtain information or equipment to inform and protect them during the coronavirus pandemic. This [op-ed](#) by IDSN Ambassador Aidan McQuade and IDSN's Ritwajit Das, looked at the current challenges faced by Dalit waste pickers in India based on on-the-ground interviews with workers.

### JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT - 19 NOVEMBER

#### South Asia: Authorities must urgently protect sanitation workers risking their lives on the COVID-19 frontlines

On the occasion of World Toilet Day 2020, IDSN, WaterAid and Amnesty International released a [joint statement](#) on the urgent need to protect sanitation workers in South Asia and ensure that the ban on manual scavenging is upheld and workers are properly rehabilitated and recompensed. The caste dimensions of sanitation work in South Asia were highlighted in the statement. WaterAid also launched a [resource repository](#) on sanitation workers in India with a wealth of reports, videos and information about the issues faced and a focus on caste and gender issues.

# Business and Human Rights

IDSN engaged on caste and labour rights, slavery and due diligence in supply chains through UN and EU advocacy and communication and awareness raising activities.

The link between caste, slavery and child labour is strong, as a low caste status often defines the occupations available to you and severely restricts the alternatives. There is little or no awareness of the need to act on caste discrimination among companies.

In 2020, IDSN promoted new research on labour exploitation in cotton, sugarcane and stone industries in South Asia and engaged with key UN and EU mechanisms and processes to work towards ending caste-based labour exploitation, slavery and discrimination. IDSN also highlighted the urgent need to address caste discrimination in global supply chains at key webinars and processes. Furthermore, IDSN specifically addressed the vulnerability and need for protection of Dalit workers suffering from some of the worst impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (see the box on the previous page for details).

In this chapter we bring you some of the key highlights of IDSN's work in 2020 under the theme of business and human rights.

## Advocating for inclusion of caste in proposed new EU due diligence legislation

In May 2020, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Didier Reynders, announced that the EU Commission will introduce a legislative initiative in 2021 on mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence for EU based companies. If this legislation is introduced, EU companies can be held responsible for human rights violations in their supply chains, wherever they occur.

The initiative was announced at a webinar hosted by the European Parliament Working Group on Responsible

Business Conduct, during which the Commissioner presented the findings of the Commission's recently published study on due diligence requirements through supply chains.

IDSN engaged in the process by inputting into relevant reports and consultations including providing [input](#) to the Inception Impact Assessment on Sustainable Corporate Governance launched by the European Commission, as a preliminary step prior to the drafting of a proposal for legislation on mandatory Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence. IDSN also invited members, associates and affiliates to participate in the public consultation on Sustainable Corporate Governance and proposed the inclusion of mentions of "lower caste communities" as one of the groups of stakeholders to be consulted in the conception and implementation of the legislation in the [model response](#) to be promoted by the core coalition of NGOs working at EU level.

IDSN will continue to track developments and hopes that the European Commission will launch an ambitious legislative proposal in 2021.

## Responding to the suspension of fundamental labour rights in India

Later in May, IDSN supported and promoted the call to action on Labour Law changes in India, issued by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). The [statement](#) called on businesses sourcing in India to respond to the news that several Indian states would suspend key fundamental labour rights for a period of up to three years, under the cover of the Covid-19 crisis.

The laws that were suspended related to basic consultation with workers, contract workers, industrial disputes, occupational health and safety, working conditions and an extension of working hours from 48 hours a week to 72 hours a week.

## Sowing Hope

**Child labour and non-payment of minimum wages in hybrid cottonseed and vegetable seed production in India**

Davuluri Venkateswarlu  
Glocal Research, Hyderabad

June 2020  
Commissioned by

ARISA

**PARADOX OF THE SWEETEST CROP**

Child Labour and its Gendered Dimensions in the Sugarcane Supply Chain in India  
September 2020

GLOBAL MARCH  
FOR TRADE, JOBS & CLIMATE

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## Between a rock and a hard place

**Social and labour conditions in sandstone production in Rajasthan, India**

Arisa  
Utrecht, The Netherlands

June 2020

ARISA

### Report: Over 50% of child labourers in cottonseed farms in India are Dalits or Adivasis

The report published by IDSN International Associate, Arisa, found that children under 14 years account for over 18 per cent of the workforce in the cottonseed farms surveyed, with Dalits or Adivasis representing over 50 per cent of the child labourers in the sector. The majority of the child labourers were not attending school. IDSN welcomed the report 'Sowing Hope' and urged companies to address caste discrimination directly, as it is a key root cause of child labour, also evidenced by the large percentage of Dalits documented to be engaged in this work.

### Research on caste and child labour in Sugarcane in India

The report published by Global March against Child Labour finds the sugarcane supply chain in India employs Dalit children, both paid and unpaid during seasonal harvesting, within a larger system of organised and normalised practices of debt bondage leading to bonded and child labour. Most children were not in school and working under some form of compulsion. The report states, "child labour in sugarcane supply chain in India is linked with structural forms of caste-based exploitation that has still kept the historical practice of forced and bonded labour in agriculture alive." IDSN promoted the report.

### Study: Dalits and Adivasis working under hazardous conditions in India's stone industry

Dangerous working conditions, debt bondage and below minimum wages are some of the findings of the study 'Between a rock and a hard place' released by Arisa. In the quarries surveyed in Rajasthan, it was found that over 60 per cent of the workers were Adivasis or Dalits. IDSN welcomed the study and urged companies to address the issues identified urgently, including looking at the marginalisation of Dalits and Adivasis as a key contributor to their exploitation in the sector.

IDSN strongly urged employers in the affected states, and companies sourcing from these states, to live up to international labour and human rights obligations and to push for these new measures to be challenged. The statement was carried in key outlets on business and human rights and circulated through IDSN communications and advocacy channels.

### New reports highlighted by IDSN

IDSN promoted key reports on Dalit children working in cottonseed farms and sugarcane fields and hazardous conditions in India's stone industry, engaging with organisations and raising global awareness.

### Call for caste legislation as US tech giant is accused of discrimination

In July, technology giant Cisco faced allegations that the company has not taken proper action to stop caste discrimination within its workforce.

The [federal lawsuit](#) by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), alleged that dominant caste managers at Cisco's San Jose headquarters campus, which employs a predominantly South Asian workforce, harassed, discriminated, and retaliated against an engineer because he is a Dalit.

The lawsuit against Cisco is a landmark case because it is the first civil rights case in the US where a government department is suing an American company for failing to protect caste oppressed employees and creating a hostile workplace. The case underscores the need for legislation outlawing caste-based discrimination in countries with South Asian diaspora communities, such as the US and UK. IDSN promoted the call by activists for caste legislation in the US. At the close of 2020 there is still no resolution to this case.

Following the lawsuit, the Ambedkar King Study Circle put out a call for testimonies of caste discrimination in the US, which resulted in documentation of individual experiences of caste discrimination in the US. Later in 2020, the Dalit Solidarity Network – UK launched a similar evidence gathering [campaign](#) for stories of everyday casteism.

### **Caste, slavery and labour rights raised at the UN Human Rights Council and UN Forum on Business and Human Rights**

IDSN raised caste, slavery and labour rights in its Human Rights Council recommendations for the [43rd](#), [44th](#) and [45th](#) session. At the 45th session IDSN also supported IMADR's general [statement](#) at the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Slavery, welcoming the SR's "strong stance on the urgency to eradicate descent-based slavery, that remains a reality in Mauritania, but also in Mali, Niger and in other countries," and raising concern for manual scavengers and sewer cleaners in South Asia.

In November, IDSN participated in the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights. IDSN also submitted [replies](#) on caste-based discrimination to the consultation organised by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, emphasizing the need to address caste discrimination under the due diligence concept. This consultation was held in commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

### **UN experts voice concern over caste-based slavery during UN webinar**

In December 2020, UN experts spoke out about the links between discrimination and slavery at the UN [webinar](#) "Contemporary Slavery and Racial Discrimination: Civil Society Support to Survivors during the Pandemic". Several experts raised concern over caste discrimination and caste-based occupations as well as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups. Panellists included slavery survivors, civil society and UN experts.

Vibhawari Kamble, an Associate Human Rights Officer of the OHCHR, spoke to share her own story, both as a former fellow of the Slavery Fund Fellowship Programme and as a Dalit woman who is a survivor of exclusion, marginalisation and sexual abuse. Ms. Kamble highlighted the practice of manual scavenging in India and the need for solidarity with the Dalit women challenging the work that has been passed down to them for centuries.

**"I would like to stress that this is a social movement led by Dalit women, who have organised themselves to challenge caste-based occupations that push them into slavery-like practices."**

Vibhawari Kamble, Associate Human Rights Officer of the OHCHR, speaking at the UN webinar

The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata, explained that his mandate has received information of increases in discrimination and violence against Dalits and other marginalised groups and stressed that states must work to mitigate these risks. Mr. Obokata highlighted that in India 100 million internal migrant workers were forced to return home due to the pandemic and were reportedly subjected to police brutality and stigmatised as virus carriers.

**"People from marginalised racial and ethnic minority groups, including those affected by caste-based discrimination, have been employed in high numbers in transport, health and cleaning sectors that carry an increased risk of contracting Covid-19, particularly when employers fail to provide protective equipment or introduce adequate safety measures."**

Tomoya Obokata, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, speaking at the UN webinar

## Caste, Business and Human Rights

### Ethical Trade Norway seminar on the need to tackle caste in global supply chains



In December, IDSN presented on the panel of the event "Modern Slavery: Stakeholder dialogue on Caste in Global Supply Chains" organised by Ethical Trade Norway and the Dalit Solidarity Network - Norway, to discuss ways to tackle caste discrimination in global supply chains and the need for global companies to act.

Executive Director of Ethical Trade Norway, Heidi Furustøl, explained how caste is the biggest single enabler of modern slavery in South Asia and that addressing caste discrimination links directly to the UN Global Goals and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

IDSN Executive Director, Meena Varma, presented on how caste related human and labour rights abuses occur widely in supply chains in South Asia and explained how Dalit workers are not only the most vulnerable to human rights abuses but also the most invisible workers.

"We need a European wide policy on caste, business and human rights in supply chains, and this should be part of mandatory due diligence frameworks ... We must go to the very end of supply chains – because this is where modern slavery happens." Meena Varma, IDSN Executive Director, speaking at the Ethical Trade Norway Seminar

She informed participants that there is very little awareness of rights and remedies among Dalit workers and even where there is awareness, impunity and serious obstacles to obtaining justice due to deeply ingrained caste discrimination are rife, as is employment discrimination. She stressed the need to involve Dalits in everything, from planning, policy-making to implementation, and making them a key part of stakeholder engagement.

This was echoed by Stine Foss who launched a new practical Roadmap for stakeholder engagement, just released by Ethical Trade Norway in collaboration with NORAD.

Representing the corporate perspective, Vegard Neverlien of Norwegian garment company, Varner, offered important insight how to work through stakeholder engagement in South Asia to improve the situation.

"Human rights risks in India include caste and gender and it is complex to navigate and important to verify information received and actually investigate the situation and engage with workers ... It is important to collaborate across a wider group of stakeholders and with other companies to address abuses, including those related to caste discrimination such as the Sumangali Scheme in the cotton spinning mills where Dalit girls work in bonded labour." Vegard Neverlien of Norwegian garment company, Varner speaking at the Ethical Trade Norway Seminar

He stressed the need to address the suppliers of suppliers and work deeper with the communities to address issues beyond the factory floor in tier 3 and beyond of supply chains.

Ms. Furustøl recommended that companies use the ETI-UK/IDSN [guidance](#) publication Caste in Global Supply Chains and the new Ethical Trade Norway [roadmap](#) for stakeholder engagement to start working on this issue immediately.



Dalit girls in Bangladesh. Photo by Abir Abdullah ©

## Equality and Participation

The IDSN thematic objective of equality and participation is cross-cutting and was at the heart of all of IDSN's work in 2020. Caste discrimination affects every aspect of the lives of those impacted, and participation of Dalits in societies, economies, processes and politics is key to changing the dynamics and ending caste discrimination.

In this chapter we look at some examples from 2020 of the more general level highlights, activities and processes on equality and participation not mentioned previously.

This includes highlighting caste-hate speech at UN and EU events on the basis of research carried out by IDSN to be published in 2021, co-organising a webinar with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and engaging with the Nepal Universal Periodic Review and a consultation on caste and the UN Global Goals.

In addition to what is mentioned here, IDSN engaged in dozens of consultations and webinars and offered key input where relevant to support equality and participation for those affected by caste discrimination.

### European Parliament calls for an EU policy to address caste discrimination

In January, IDSN issued a [press release](#) to welcome the adoption of the European Parliament's annual [report](#) on human rights and democracy in the world highlighting the report's call on the EU "to act on its own grave concerns over caste discrimination" and move to develop an "EU policy on caste discrimination".

In the report, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) also call for "the adoption of an EU instrument for the prevention and elimination of caste-based discrimination". Moving forward, the EU and its Member States are once again urged, "to intensify efforts and support initiatives at UN and delegation level to eliminate caste discrimination".

The European Parliament's report also notes "with great concern the scale and consequences of caste hierarchies, caste-based discrimination and the perpetuation of caste-based human rights violations, including the denial of

access to the legal system or employment, continued segregation, poverty and stigmatisation, and caste-related barriers to the exercise of basic human rights and facilitation of human development".

IDSN also engaged with EU bodies and mechanisms to push for action on the issues raised in the report.

## Caste and the UN Global Goals

Later in January, IDSN participated in the National Consultation "Localizing SDGs through Dalit perspectives", drawing together over eighty delegates from fifteen states in India to discuss ways forward to address caste and gender discrimination vis-à-vis the UN Global Goals. The consultation took place in New Delhi and covered a wide range of issues related to caste discrimination, equality and participation. It was organised by a coalition, including IDSN members the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW).

## Stakeholder consultation on the UN UPR of Nepal

In February, IDSN took part in the National Stakeholder Consultation on the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Nepal, organised by IDSN members, led by the Dalit NGO Federation, Feminist Dalit Organization and Jagaran Media Centre together with IDSN affiliate the Dalit Welfare Organisation and over thirty other Dalit NGOs in Nepal. The Consultation highlighted the need to act to end caste discrimination and promote caste and gender justice. Over 70 participants from CSOs, media, academia, and Government took part in the consultation.

The consultation also influenced the joint stakeholder [submission](#) on the Nepal UPR submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by Dalit Civil Society Organizations' Coalition for UPR, Nepal, in collaboration with IDSN and the [factsheet](#) issued by IDSN and member Dalit NGO Federation in Nepal, which was circulated widely.

## OHCHR webinar "When language excludes and discriminates" co-organised by IDSN

In October, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) hosted the [global webinar](#) "When language excludes and discriminates". The event

was co-organised by IDSN and focused on descent-based discrimination and words that serve to discriminate, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The webinar highlighted the need to move away from using the stigmatising concept of "social distancing", which has been commonplace across UN agencies during the Covid-19 pandemic, and replace this with the term "safe distancing". As Dalit activists explained, the term "social distancing" feeds directly into notions of untouchability, purity and pollution and is exacerbating caste discrimination in South Asia.

## IDSN engages on caste with the UN Human Rights Council and Special Procedures

IDSN issued recommendations to states, contributed to statements and observed and noted caste-relevant issues presented at the UN Human Rights Council [43rd](#), [44th](#) and [45th](#) sessions in relation to caste discrimination, equality and participation. The IDSN UN advocacy consultant was in contact with key special procedures mandate holders on this topic on several occasions.

IDSN also contributed to and supported the Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network [petition](#) calling for the United Nations to build forward better on descent and caste-based discrimination with concrete recommendations for civil society, UN human rights council members and UN member states, UN special procedures mandate holders and treaty bodies.

## #BlackLivesMatter solidarity

There are clear links and synergies between the #BlackLivesMatter and #DalitLivesMatter movements and in 2020 mutual support has been increasing.

In June 2020, IDSN issued a statement condemning the murder of George Floyd and offering solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and all those killed because of systemic inequality, racism and discrimination every day.

Later in 2020, veteran civil rights and #BlackLivesMatter campaigner Professor Angela Davis gave a video [statement](#) about the need for increased solidarity with the #DalitLivesMatter movement. The release of the highly acclaimed book 'Caste' by Isabel Wilkerson also highlighted the many similarities between the movements.

# Caste-hate speech raised at the UN Forum on Minority Issues and EU NGO Human Rights Forum

In November, IDSN delivered strong statements on the need to address caste-hate speech, at the UN Forum on Minority Issues under the theme "Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities".

**"In many countries, more than 80% of hate speech targets minorities, such as Jews, Dalits, Muslims, Roma, travellers and others"**

Fernand De Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, speaking at the Minority Forum

Representatives of IDSN spoke specifically about caste-hate speech and the issues faced by Dalits, and especially Dalit women.

Concern was also raised over trolling and online threats of rape and murder against Dalits and Dalit rights defenders, offering a number of recommendations to stand up to digital caste-hate speech.

**"There are seldom any mechanisms of accountability to address hate speech and other hostilities from discrimination based on work and descent or Dalit perspective. Social media and the online world is mirroring the offline world, where prejudice and hatred towards marginalised communities continue to exist."**

Beena Pallical, from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, in her [statement](#) at the Forum

A Dalit activist from Nepal representing Dignity Initiative painted a similar picture of Dalits in online spaces in Nepal in his [presentation](#).

A [statement](#) from IDSN outlining the positive and negative aspects of social media for Dalits was delivered by the Membership Coordinator, pointing out that while access to social media for many Dalit activists has increased the space for Dalit voices, there remain many challenges, offering key recommendations for action and change.

Ahead of the Forum, there was also broad participation from the IDSN network in the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum in March on "Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities"

where Dalit human rights defenders from Nepal, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh spoke up at the forum sharing information and experiences of how Dalits are targeted for online and offline bullying and how very often hate crimes have been preceded by escalated hate speech. They also offered recommendations on ways to address caste hate speech online and offline and create a more open civic space where threats and abuse are not everyday occurrences. IDSN also participated in the European Regional Forum delivering a statement and offering key recommendations on addressing caste-hate speech, especially in the context of the diaspora in the UK.

The input from the [regional forums](#) and the UN Minority Forum will feed into the thematic work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues for his report to the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2021.

In December, IDSN again highlighted the need for urgent action to curb caste-hate speech "spreading like wildfire", speaking at the EU NGO Human Rights Forum keynote [panel](#) on 'Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in the Digital Sphere'.

The IDSN Membership Coordinator explained to the Forum participants that activists are facing a serious backlash on social media, stressing how Dalit women are especially targeted. He outlined key characteristics of caste-hate speech and the dangers of this and offered six key [recommendations](#).

**"Dalit Women routinely face extreme attacks. The online prevalence of caste-hate speech has resulted in real-life atrocities. Dalit women go through character assassination in online spaces and the perpetrator can escape by hiding under perceived caste supremacy."**

Ritwajit Das, International Dalit Solidarity Network, speaking at the EU NGO Forum

Patrick Penninckx, Head of Information Society Department, Council of Europe, spoke alongside Mr. Das on the panel. He informed participants that the Council of Europe are working on a comprehensive legal instrument to address hate speech. IDSN will continue to engage with the EU on this issue.



Dalit women in India. Photo by Ekta Parishad ©

## Organisation and Networking

### Engaging with the IDSN membership

As a network, all of IDSN's work is done on the basis of engagement with the membership, associates and affiliates. In the previous chapters there are numerous examples of joint efforts, promotion of reports, campaigns, consultation and webinars by IDSN members, associates and affiliates, and participation in IDSN events and initiatives. Beyond the engagement on specific processes, events and initiatives, IDSN also continued its membership mapping efforts in 2020.

The IDSN Coordinator visited members and associates in India and Nepal, holding meetings to align programme objectives and advocacy strategies associated with Dalit human rights at national, regional and international levels.

In March, IDSN participated in meetings in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with the South Asia Collective, led by IDSN International Associate, Minority Rights Group International, raising the need for action on caste discrimination. IDSN participated in the report launch of the South Asia State of Minorities Report 2019 –

Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless. IDSN also engaged in networking and dialogue with other human rights organisations based out of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan at the meeting.

In September, IDSN prepared an online webinar, especially tailored to its national members on the submission of information to the UN Special Procedures and other UN bodies. This webinar aimed at increasing the network's effort in feeding the UN mechanisms with first-hand and accurate information on incidents and perspectives of caste discrimination worldwide. The IDSN UN Consultant facilitated the webinar which had wide attendance and participation from IDSN network members.

In November, the IDSN Executive Director spoke at the 10-year anniversary celebration of the Dalit Solidarity Network Finland. This was an online event bringing together more than thirty participants from Nepal, India, UK and many parts of Finland, including Vice-President of the European Parliament, Heidi Hautala MEP, who gave a keynote address.

## Website, newsletter and social media

IDSN also engaged with members, associates and affiliates as well as with the wider public, policy makers, academics and activists through all the IDSN communication channels such as the website, newsletters and social media.

The IDSN website serves the network as well as a broad global user base of activists, academics, policy and decision-makers, and continues to be the leading global resource on caste-based discrimination. In 2020 idsn.org had over 70,000 users, a rise of 13 per cent compared to 2019. Pageviews rose by over 10 per cent to 139,400. Looking at user demographics, the number of users between 18-24 rose by over 38 per cent compared to the previous year, reflecting well on IDSN's objectives of reaching the youth. There were trackable visits from over 180 different countries and over 100 universities.

IDSN posted over 240 [new entries](#) in the IDSN online documentation [database](#) on caste discrimination in 2020, where entries are cross-referenced and searchable according to theme, institution, country and year, as well as other relevant parameters.

Forty-one [news articles](#) were written and published on the IDSN website. The articles cover developments at the UN and EU level as well as in countries affected by caste discrimination. They are based on IDSN's work and input from network members and associates. Some of the key themes dealt with in these articles are the protection of Dalit human rights defenders, Dalit women and gender justice, equal participation and business and human rights.

News from IDSN's network members and associates as well as the news articles written by IDSN, were published in IDSN's [newsletters](#). The newsletters have a varied readership - from UN and EU decision-makers, academics to human rights defenders from a wide range of countries. 2020 saw a 20 per cent increase in the amount of subscribers to the IDSN newsletter.

Followers on IDSN's Twitter channel rose markedly in 2020 by over 44 per cent and engagement with IDSN tweets also rose, with a rise in link clicks by almost 80 per cent

## UN ECOSOC

### IDSN's application for UN ECOSOC UN consultative status

IDSN continued to do targeted advocacy work with diplomatic missions and relevant officials, including the Assistant Secretary General on Human Rights, to push for IDSN's ECOSOC accreditation to be granted, in order to give IDSN official UN Consultative status. The IDSN application for ECOSOC status has been deferred for over a decade on unjust grounds.

During the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative for Human Rights, during the 45th Session of the Human Rights Council, the International Service for Human Rights delivered a statement stating that the International Dalit Solidarity Network has received 97 questions over 13 years from the Committee on NGOs and comparing this to a reprisal where every member of the Committee is complicit in the act. The IDSN UN Advocacy Officer held meetings with several delegates and UN officials regarding IDSN's protracted accreditation application.

compared to 2019. IDSN's social media channels continue to be an important part of IDSN's internal and external communications, with members and associates interacting regularly via social media and cross promoting news and documentation. IDSN's Facebook followers also saw an over 10% rise in 2020 to over 10,000. Part of the increase in Twitter and Facebook followers can be ascribed to the successful livecast "Caste and Colourism" debate (see box on pg. 7) on the IDSN Facebook page which resulted in an influx of new followers on both platforms.

Views of IDSN's online video on Dalit women grew to a total of over 209,000 views, a rise of over 25% from 2019 and views of the IDSN intro video on caste discrimination passed 88,000 views. The original "I'm Dalit, How Are You?" video by IDSN also reached 224,756 views in total.

## Governance

The IDSN 5-year [strategy](#) adopted at the end of 2018, steered IDSN's work and Governance in 2020.

The IDSN Board had virtual meetings throughout the year. Board members play an active role in many of IDSN's activities. In 2020, IDSN's Board held three virtual meetings in January, April and October, as well as several other ad hoc meetings as required.

The gender composition of IDSN's board as of the 31 December 2020 is five women and four men.

### IDSN Board Members as of 31 December 2020:

- Beena Pallical  
National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India
- Bhakta Bishwakarma  
Dalit NGO Federation, Nepal
- Einar Tjelle  
Dalit Solidarity Network, Norway
- Henri Tiphagne  
People's Watch, India
- Manuela Ott  
Dalit Solidarity, Germany
- Meenakshi Ganguly  
Human Rights Watch, India
- Megumi Komori  
International Movement against All forms of Discrimination and Racism, Japan
- Renu Sijapati  
Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal
- Sono Khangharani  
Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, Pakistan

## Secretariat

The Secretariat team welcomed Helene de Rengerve, who joined in August 2020, to undertake the role of EU Advocacy Consultant, based in Brussels.

### IDSN secretariat staff as of 31 December 2020:

- Executive Director  
Meena Varma
- Head of Communications  
Maria Brink Schleimann
- Programme and Finance Assistant  
Madeleine Cowper
- UN Advocacy Consultant  
Paulo Lugon Arantes
- EU Advocacy Consultant  
Helene de Rengerve
- Membership Coordinator  
Ritwajit Das
- Bookkeeper  
Peter Søby Petersen

Aside from the Programme and Finance Assistant, the rest of the secretariat staff work part-time.

## Finances and funding

We would like to thank the following for their generous contribution to IDSN in 2020: the Norwegian Human Rights Foundation, Bread for the World (Germany) and those who made individual private donations through PayPal. IDSN continued fundraising efforts in 2020 in order to ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of the organisation.

## FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020

### Profit and loss

	2020 DKK	2020 EURO	2019 DKK
<b>Opening balance<sup>1</sup></b>	1,152,503.07	154,373.08	405,691.91
Income			
DanChurchAid			200,000.00
Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs			387,773.39
Norwegian Human Rights Fund	1,024,800.00	137,267.77	1,095,210.28
Brot für die Welt	706,530.48	94,636.87	1,207,361.00
Hermod Lannungs Fund			48,340.00
Other income			27,864.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,731,330.48</b>	<b>231,904.64</b>	<b>2,966,549.32</b>
Expenditure	2,092,382.07	280,266.03	2,219,738.16
Result	-361,051.59	-48,361.38	746,811.16
<b>Balance</b>	<b>791,451.48</b>	<b>106,011.69</b>	<b>1,152,503.07</b>

### Balance statement

	2020 DKK	2020 EURO	2019 DKK
Assets			
<b>Cash at bank at 31.12.</b>	<b>959,144.19</b>	<b>128,473.44</b>	<b>1,246,197.28</b>
Other assets			
Petty cash	2,207.32	295.66	1,221.32
Outstanding accounts	24,417.10	3,270.57	107,229.44
<b>Total other assets</b>	<b>26,624.42</b>	<b>3,566.23</b>	<b>108,450.76</b>
Liabilities			
Balance Master Card account	-1,411.58	-189.08	-24,630.50
Compulsory holiday payment fund	-5,802.72	-777.25	-14,291.67
Outstanding Accounts <sup>2</sup>	-187,102.83	-25,061.66	-113,222.80
H. Lannungs Fund 2020			- 50,000.00
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>-194,317.13</b>	<b>-26,027.99</b>	<b>-202,144.97</b>
<b>Balance carried forward</b>	<b>791,451.48</b>	<b>106,011.69</b>	<b>1,152,503.07</b>

The financial statements are presented in Danish kroner. Please find the full financial statements on the IDSN website.

For reasons of comparison, amounts in Euro are presented, using a fixed exchange rate based on a monthly average from [www.inforeuro.eu](http://www.inforeuro.eu): 7,4657

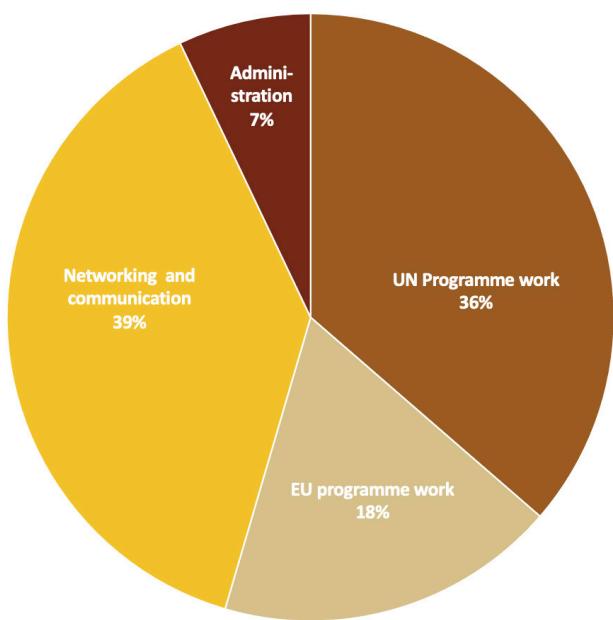
Hence, some discrepancies may appear compared to actual amounts received in Euro.

#### Notes:

1. Opening balance is in accordance with accounts for 2019

2. Consists of audit, annual report, insurance, tax for 2020 to be paid in 2021

## IDSN EXPENDITURE 2020





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[www.idsн.org](http://www.idsн.org)

### IDSN members

#### India

- The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
- The National Federation of Dalit Women
- People's Watch
- Navsarjan Trust

#### Nepal

- Dalit NGO Federation
- The Feminist Dalit Organization
- Nepal Dalit National Social Welfare Organisation
- Jagaran Media Center

#### Bangladesh

- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement
- Network of Non-Mainstreamed Marginalized Communities

#### Pakistan

- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network

#### Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe

- Dalit Solidarity Network – UK
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Norway
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Finland
- Dalit Solidarität Deutschland (Germany)

### International Associates

- Human Rights Watch
- International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination (IMADR)
- Asian Human Rights Commission
- Asian Centre for Human Rights
- Minority Rights Group International
- Anti-Slavery International
- The Rafto Foundation
- Lutheran World Federation
- Robert Kennedy Memorial Foundation, USA
- ICMICA/Pax Romana
- World Council of Churches
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
- Franciscans International
- Advocating Rights In South Asia (Arisa)

### Affiliates

- NYU School of Law's Center for Human Rights and Global Justice
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies – Sri Lanka
- Social Awareness Society for Youths - India
- National Dalit Christian Watch - India
- Dalit Welfare Organisation - Nepal
- WAYVE Foundation

### Connect with IDSН



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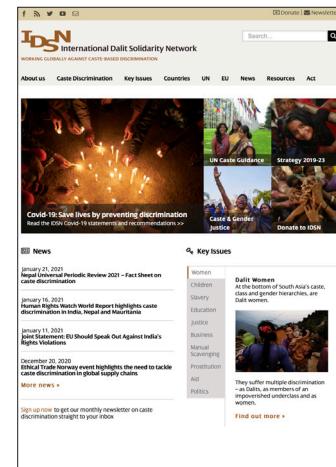


[twitter.com/idsnupdates](https://twitter.com/idsnupdates)



[youtube.com/idsnvideo](https://youtube.com/idsnvideo)

[www.idsн.org](http://www.idsн.org)



The IDSН website [www.idsн.org](http://www.idsн.org)



was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSН is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe, and organisations in caste-affected countries. IDSН engages with the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral institutions, working for action-oriented approaches to address 'untouchability' and other human rights abuses against Dalits and similar communities that suffer discrimination based on work and descent. IDSН bases its work on contributions from members, associates and affiliates. The network produces crucial input in the form of documentation, strategic interventions and lobby action and also supports national level lobbying.