



EMBARGOED PRESS RELEASE:

Campaign to #EndCasteBasedSexualViolence launched by National Council of Women Leaders

INDIA, July 19, 2021: [National Council of Women Leaders \(NCWL\)](#) is a newly established coalition bringing together from across India over 70 women leaders who belong to a range of marginalised backgrounds and have been working at the grassroot to support and empower disadvantaged women and girls in their communities.

Breaking new ground by creating a high profile platform exclusively for women from different marginalised groups, NCWL was established in February, 2021, with the mandate of facilitating cooperation, collaboration, and amplification of collective solidarity and expression. The Council is creating a unique space for members to celebrate their own identities, raise their voices and boldly champion the rights of women and those from communities facing discrimination.

Campaign to #EndCasteBasedSexualViolence

Working in collaboration with [Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network \(DHRD-Net\)](#), [Equality Labs](#), and [Equality Now](#), NCWL is launching a **national campaign** running from July 19th to August 31st 2021, which will draw much-needed public attention to how Dalit women and girls are being deliberately subjected to widespread sexual violence and harrasment stemming from severe, pervasive and intersectional discrimination tied to their gender, caste and class. Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of these social structures, the socio-economic vulnerability and low political status of Dalit women and girls increases their

exposure to human rights violations, while simultaneously reducing their ability to escape harm or access justice.

Sexual violence is being used by those in dominant positions as a weapon to assert power and reinforce existing hierarchies. Dalit women and girls are often subjected to more severe or aggravated forms of sexual violence, such as gang rapes or rape with murder, and there is commonly a collective nature to these crimes, with offenders from dominant castes acting in groups to commit offences.

Survivors of sexual violence, particularly those from marginalized communities, struggle to obtain justice within India's legal system. The horrific gangrape and murder of the 19-year-old Dalit woman in Hathras, and the deplorable way in which it was dealt with by many in authority, has shown a spotlight on how men from dominant castes are granted protection and impunity at all levels.

Perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse know they are far less likely to face punishment if they commit a crime against members of the Dalit community because attacks are rarely investigated or prosecuted. Police often refuse to register cases, coerce survivors into compromises, or declare cases false.

For the small proportion of sexual violence crimes that India's criminal court system does prosecute, conviction rates remain abysmally low. Survivors and their families who seek legal justice are often subjected to extreme pressure to stay silent, and cases that do make it to court mostly involve the most egregious crimes, such as when the victim has been killed or is a young girl.

Data from India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2019 reported that [ten Dalit women and girls are raped every day](#) in India. Extensive under-reporting, problems registering sexual assaults with the police, and the sharp rise in sexual and gender-based violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, mean the true figures are likely to be considerably higher.

NCWL's campaign will showcase caste-based sexual violence in 15 Indian states, sharing a selection of landmark cases of crimes against Dalit women and girls dating from 1985 to now, which demonstrate the longterm, deeprooted nature of this systemic targeting. The Council will also report on developments - or lack thereof - in how the criminal justice system and others in authority respond to such cases, noting the specific barriers that survivors of sexual violence face which prevent them from receiving justice or support.

Throughout the campaign, NCWL will be hosting a series of activities, bringing together women's rights activists to share experiences and methods, advocate for positive change, and hold duty bearers to account. Data, visuals, and other creative tools to communicate the problem to a broader audience will be provided, alongside videos of activists working with survivors and victims' families from marginalised communities. The campaign will culminate in the creation and sharing of key recommendations for policy makers, government authorities and civil society to improve responses to cases of caste-based sexual violence.

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Notes to Editors:

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About NCWL: National Council of Women Leaders (NCWL) is a body working across India, uniting grassroots leaders from marginalised communities. They work to give visibility and highlight the work of women/trans women leaders and to collaborate and build solidarities with other marginalised women leaders in South Asia and globally. Learn more about them on their [website](#), and [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) handles.

About DHRD-Net: Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet) is a coalition of over 1000 Dalit human rights defenders from different states of India. They mostly concentrate their work in five states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Learn more about them on their [website](#), and [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) handles.

About Equality Labs: Equality Labs is a Dalit civil rights organization dedicated to ending caste apartheid, gender-based violence, islamophobia, white supremacy and religious intolerance. They center the leadership of South Asian caste oppressed, queer, and religious minority communities in an ongoing redefinition of South Asian identity across the world. Learn more about them on their [website](#), and [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) handles.

About Equality Now: Equality Now is an international human rights organisation that works to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls around the world. They combine grassroots activism with international, regional and national legal advocacy to achieve legal and systemic change to benefit all women and girls, and work to ensure that governments enact and enforce laws and policies that uphold their rights. Learn more about them on their [website](#), and [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) handles.