



2021

annual report



International Dalit Solidarity Network
WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

2021 annual report

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- UN Special Rapporteurs on Violence against Women and Extreme Poverty meet with Dalit defenders
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- IDSN calls for action to end caste discrimination in supply chains at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights
- Dalit activists highlight caste discrimination at the European Development Days IDSN virtual stand
- IDSN promotes two films featuring Dalit women as key agents of change in India and Nepal
- IDSN inputs in the revision of the OECD guidelines, EU mandatory due diligence processes and forced labour tool
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Foreword

Dear friends and supporters of the International Dalit Solidarity Network,

Welcome to the Annual Report 2021.

We could never have thought that a year after the initial lockdowns in 2020, 2021 would also prove to be a rollercoaster for the world

The global crisis precipitated by COVID-19 has continued to affect the most marginalised and excluded communities across the globe. There is still so much to be done.

Our three main thematic objectives – Dalit Women and Gender Justice; Business and Human Rights; Equality and Participation – remain the bedrock of the work we do.

We have strengthened relationships with international institutions by deepening the understanding of UN special mandate holders and EU officials. We have been grateful for their support in country visits to Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We look forward to seeing how the implementation of the EU's new Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence legislation can also address caste in global supply chains. With international businesses even more aware of the need to do so, we hope they will continue to reach out to find solutions and actions.

As always, particular thanks goes to the IDSN Board and Secretariat who have worked tirelessly over the past two years 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.

So, once again, thank you all for the hard work, commitment and dedication you have shown to the work of IDSN for so many years. Our work here has not ended, but together we can try to make the world a better place.

Meena Varma

Executive Director - IDSN

Dalit Women and Gender Justice

In 2021, IDSN continued to build on the work with Dalit women human rights defenders to promote and ensure caste and gender justice. Dalit women met with UN Special Rapporteurs and delegations from the European Parliament and spoke at key events facilitated by IDSN. IDSN also featured caste and gender issues in key input, submissions and reports to UN human rights mechanisms and EU processes, as well as in the work on business and human rights. Activities of network members, associates, affiliates and others on caste and gender justice were supported and promoted as were two ground-breaking films.

IDSN calls for action to end caste and gender based violence in the garment industry

Since the beginning of 2021, IDSN has worked together with the Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) to bring attention to the rape and murder of the young Dalit woman, Jeyasre Kathiravel, by her dominant caste supervisor at a garment factory supplying global apparel brands.

In April 2021, IDSN issued the [joint statement](#) 'Act now to end caste and gender based violence and discrimination in the garment industry calling for a binding agreement on caste and gender based violence'. IDSN promoted the statement through all IDSN communications channels. IDSN also sent the statement to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), UN delegations and officials and other key EU and UN stakeholders. The issue was also raised at the UN Business and Human Rights Forum, read more about this in the next chapter.

New report on caste and gender justice

In May, the status [report](#) 'Dalit Women Rise for Justice' was launched by IDSN member, AIDMAM-NCDHR, which was promoted widely by IDSN. The report focuses on the current status of Dalit women in India, the nature and extent of crimes committed against them and the existing gaps in the system which create barriers in accessing justice. It also highlights a detailed analysis of the National

Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on crimes committed against Dalit women and the current socio-economic and political status of Dalit women in the country.

The IDSN Executive Director contributed to the report with a letter of appreciation and IDSN circulated it widely.

Dalit activist speaks out on caste and gender discrimination at Europe Day in Nepal

Also in May, Sarita Pariyar, from IDSN member organisation, the Samata Foundation, [spoke on a panel](#) at Europe Day in Nepal, organised by EU institutions in Europe, as well as its delegations and offices.

Ms Pariyar spoke about the rise in violence against Dalit women in Nepal, caste discrimination in education and society in general and the lack of action from authorities to address the deteriorating human rights situation for Dalits in Nepal. IDSN promoted her participation and statements before and after the event.

"Dalit women are not only objects of pity and development handouts, they should be treated as genuine collaborators."

Sarita Pariyar, Board member of the Samata Foundation, speaking at Europe Day 2021 in Nepal





Photos from events in Bangladesh in 2021. Photos by BDERM ©

Submission of report on gender justice and freedom of expression

In June, IDSN submitted [input](#) on caste to the study on gender justice of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression. IDSN highlighted that social spaces where Dalit women would normally freely exchange their views and ideas are fraught with several instances of sexist and casteist discrimination, which, intersected, impose considerable obstacles for the enjoyment of freedom of expression. In this submission IDSN offers advice on what can be done, to stand in solidarity with Dalit women and be a catalyst of change.

Situation of Dalit Women during the pandemic raised at the UN

During the July session of the UN Human Rights Council, human rights activist and lawyer, Manjula Pradeep, the National Council of Women Leaders (India), delivered an oral statement during the Annual Discussion on Women's Rights (recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic). The [statement](#) was delivered on behalf of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR).

"COVID-19 has impacted lives of Dalit women and girls much more than anyone in India. Especially those Dalit women engaging in the sanitation work are risking their lives in the pandemic as frontline workers without any social security. To recover from the pandemic, they have to rely on the support of human rights activists who work to provide them groceries and medical support."

Manjula Pradeep speaking at the UN Human Rights Council

Events in Bangladesh highlight the need for action on Dalit rights

In September, the Dalit Women Conclave on caste and gender justice, and a subsequent road rally to demand the long-overdue enactment of the anti-discrimination act, called for action to ensure the rights of Dalits in Bangladesh. The Dalit Women Conclave brought together Dalit leaders and activists from across Bangladesh and was organised by IDSN member the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM).

WRITING WITH FIRE



Cover art for the film 'Writing with Fire' promoted by IDSN

In her presentation at the Conclave, Pinky Rani, of the Dalit Women's Forum, highlighted the many disadvantages faced by Dalit women including in education, health, career, employment opportunities and government services. She called for action at the national and global level. IDSN promoted the event and outcome and published an [article](#) on the conclave and road rally.

Briefing of MEPs ahead of Pakistan and India visits

In late 2021, a delegation of Members of the European Parliament visited India. Ahead of the visit key Brussels-based INGOs briefed the MEPs on caste-related human rights issues, including the need to encourage India to take further steps to investigate and prevent gender-based violence and discrimination, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

IDSN also briefed the MEP delegation visiting Pakistan, highlighting the need to address violence against Dalit women as well as forced marriages and conversions. The briefing also included recommendations related to labour rights and modern slavery for MEPs to raise with the authorities during discussions on GSP+ implementation.

Dalit defenders meet with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

In October, IDSN facilitated an online meeting with South Asian Dalit women defenders, and the new Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem. These defenders exchanged views on the obstacles for Dalit women to enjoy fundamental rights on equal footing, including the right to water and sanitation, health, life, freedom of expression and assembly and political participation. The defenders also discussed the way forward to overcome these obstacles, in the spirit of "agents of change" of the SDGs, with the Rapporteur.

Dalit women and caste-based sexual violence

Throughout the year, IDSN was made aware of many cases of rape and violence against Dalit women. As a response to this IDSN produced an [analysis article](#) published in November, looking at a number of the most recent cases that attracted media and political attention. The analysis surveyed the cases and pointed out that all too often, violence against Dalit women remains unreported – in India as well as in other caste-affected countries. The article was shared widely through IDSN's communication channels.

“ABSOLUTE
”
of Film

“POWERFUL
AND RAW”
The Lancet

★★★★★
“SUPERB”
UK Film Review

★★★★★
“WONDERFUL”
Total Film

★★★★★
“REMARKABLE”
The Upcoming

“STIRRING”
The Guardian

“DARING AND
HEARTBREAKING”
Joanna Lumley



I AM Belmaya

TAKING THE CAMERA AND POWER INTO HER HANDS

A film by SUE CARPENTER and
BELMAYA NEPALI



Poster for the film 'I am Belmaya' promoted by IDSN

IDSN promotes films about Dalit women

In 2021, IDSN worked with the directors of two films on Dalit women to promote and highlight the films and the message of Dalit women agency featured in them.

In collaboration with the producers of the film 'I am Belmaya', IDSN organised an online [screening](#) and Q&A in October 2021. The documentary is made jointly by Sue Carpenter and Belmaya Nepali.

The documentary charts the life of Belmaya, who is a young Dalit woman overcoming the many obstacles associated with intersecting caste and gender discrimination in Nepal, to become a story teller and film maker and an inspiration to her community. It follows Belmaya from adolescence to becoming a young mother, and later a single mother, illustrating her perseverance in spite of the difficult circumstances she faces.

Participants at the screening and question and answer session, with Sue Carpenter and Belmaya Nepali, were eager to learn more about Belmaya's life and the film making process. Some participants were eager for Belmaya to work with them on future documentary projects in Nepal. The film has won numerous awards and IDSN will continue to promote the film.

Throughout 2021, IDSN also liaised with the directors of the documentary 'Writing with Fire'. The film tells the story of Khabar Lahariya: a media outlet in Uttar Pradesh, India, run by Dalit women. Chief Reporter Meera and a team of exclusively female journalists – armed with smartphones – break traditions on the frontlines and within the confines of their own homes. The film portrays caste and how it plays out in the lives of the Dalit journalists and the community, journeying with them to see how they challenge and negotiate a seat at the table.

In November, the Alderburgh Cinema DocFest invited IDSN Executive Director, Meena Varma, to speak at the [screening](#) of the film. Ms. Varma, took part in a panel discussion chaired by India Knight, journalist and columnist for the Sunday Times.

Ms. Varma spoke about the situation of Dalit women in India, and explained how the film hopes to inspire viewers to identify and interrogate the structural inequities that they have come to accept in their own lives and cultures and investigate their own role in it. The women this film revolves around show incredible agency and courage just like the many Dalit human right defenders that form part of IDSN and beyond.

This highly acclaimed film has been nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

Business and Human Rights

In 2021, IDSN continued to engage in activities and processes to promote and ensure action on caste-related issues within business and human rights. IDSN offered input to relevant UN, EU and OECD processes and took part in seminars, conferences and forums on business and human rights, to highlight the need for action on caste and gender discrimination and rights abuses in global supply chains. IDSN also issued a statement and briefing paper specifically addressing caste and gender based violence in the garment sector.

Input to the preparation of an EU Tool on forced Labour

In July, IDSN submitted input to the European External Action Service (EEAS) preparation of a tool on forced labour aimed at helping companies tackle the issue in their supply chain.

IDSN briefed on how caste and gender discrimination are root causes of forced and bonded labour and the need to tackle discrimination in any attempts to tackle forced labour, using examples from Pakistan, India and Nepal.

IDSN takes part in seminar in Norway

Later in July, the IDSN Executive Director, Meena Varma, took part in a [seminar](#) assessing Norway's new Transparency Act and how stakeholders can address caste discrimination in supply chains.

Ms. Varma spoke on the all-female panel of the live-streamed event discussing deep structural injustices in global production and trade, and what consequences these injustices have on the most vulnerable.

In November, Ms. Varma visited Norway to meet with the Dalit Solidarity Network Norway and Ethical Trade Norway.

She also met with the Norwegian Deputy Minister for Development and discussed the importance of addressing caste through business and human rights as well as in COVID recovery.

IDSN input to the revision of the OECD guidelines

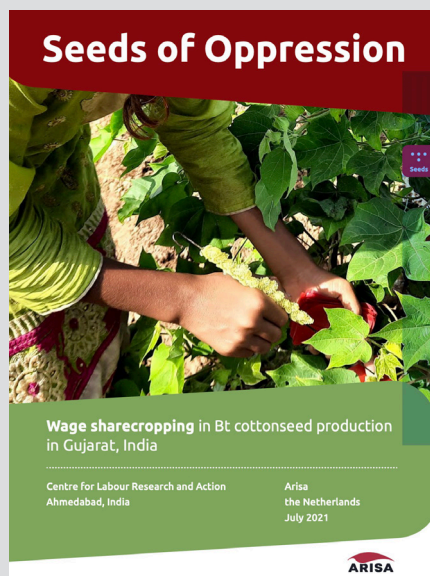
Together with international associate, Advocating Rights in South Asia (Arisa) and OECD Watch, IDSN offered several rounds of input to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stocktaking and revision process on the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The input highlighted the need to address the gap in the current guidelines when it comes to caste-based discrimination. IDSN also took part in a workshop on the revision, facilitated by the OECD.

Alongside this process, IDSN and Arisa also offered input to the OECD Watch report on the revision. IDSN's submissions were well reflected in the final [report](#) 'Get Fit: Closing gaps in the OECD Guidelines to make them fit for purpose' by OECD Watch, which stresses the need to address caste discrimination explicitly in the OECD Guidelines.

IDSN advocacy on EU mandatory human rights due diligence legislation

Throughout 2021, the EU process on drafting mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence (mHREDD) continued and IDSN followed the process closely, offering input where possible and relevant.

The IDSN EU adviser held meetings with officials and MEPs, highlighting the need for the scope of the mHREDD legislation to cover the full supply chain, at all tiers, and to engage with marginalised stakeholders and especially with Dalits in the South-Asian context.



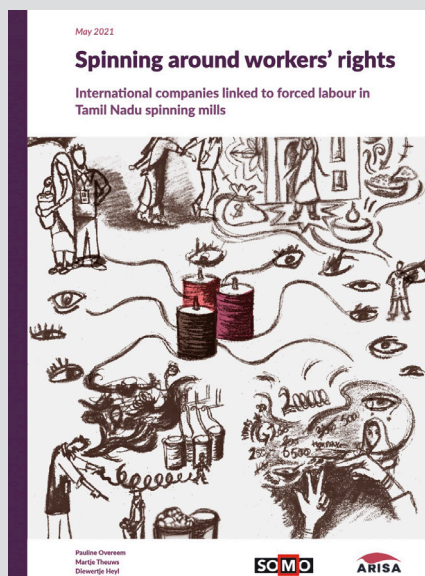
Report: Dalits work in slavery-like conditions in India's cotton seed production

The report 'Seeds of Oppression', published by IDS*N* International Associate, Arisa, describes slavery-like conditions in Gujarat's cotton seed industry.

Workers, many of them Dalits, produce cotton seed, yet receive no wages and owe the landowner debts.

The report offers key recommendations which include the need to acknowledge caste discrimination as a root cause of slavery, and the need for this to be explicitly addressed in policy documents of businesses.

Read the [recommendations](#).



Report: Dalit women working under "deplorable conditions" in Indian spinning mills

The report 'Spinning around workers' rights: International companies linked to forced labour in Tamil Nadu spinning mills', was published by SOMO/Arisa and researched 29 spinning mills in Tamil Nadu, India.

Rights violations uncovered included situations amounting to forced labour, excessive overtime, sexual harassment, violence and hostile and threatening working environments. The workers are from marginalised communities, many of them Dalits.

Read the caste-related [extracts](#).



OECD Watch report says revised OECD guidelines should specifically include caste

The report 'Get Fit: Closing gaps in the OECD Guidelines to make them fit for purpose', stresses the need to address discrimination based on caste explicitly in the OECD Guidelines that are up for revision. The report states that irresponsible business conduct has a particularly harmful impact on marginalised groups such as Dalits and that failure to safeguard women from sexual harassment in the workplace leave Dalit women especially vulnerable, due to the intersectional gender and caste discrimination they face.

Read the caste related [extracts](#).

Concerns about Dalits as a marginalised group particularly at risk were repeated systematically to ensure that they are taken into account in the definition of the mHREDD. The name of the legislation was later changed to Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence.

IDS*N* also offered [input](#) to EC Sustainable Corporate Governance public consultation and took part in the EU Engagement group on mHREDD, a broad CSO coalition.

New reports highlighted by IDS*N*

Throughout 2021, IDS*N* promoted key reports from IDS*N* members, associates, affiliates and collaborators, addressing caste, business and human rights. These reports included reports on human rights violations in the cottonseed industry and in spinning mills in India.



Dalit children in Pakistan. Photo by Jakob Carlsen ©

IDSN also promoted reports and events on wage theft by the Asia Floor Wage Alliance and papers and briefing notes on labour issues from across countries affected by caste discrimination.

Calling for businesses to act on caste discrimination in supply chains at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights

As mentioned in the previous chapter, IDSN and AFWA released a [joint statement](#) in April, calling for a binding agreement by brands sourcing from India to end caste and gender based violence and discrimination.

Following up on the statement, IDSN released a thorough [briefing paper](#) including recommendations for suppliers, transnational corporations and Governments, on urgently addressing the issue. The briefing was launched ahead of the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights 2021 and shared widely with UN and EU contacts and through IDSN communication channels.

IDSN participated in the virtual forum, learning and drawing attention to the urgent need to address caste discrimination and violence in global supply chains.

IDSN took part in many sessions including on gender mainstreaming, tech regulation, mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence and charting the next decade of UN work on business and human rights.

The IDSN recommendations and briefing paper on caste- and gender violence and discrimination in global garment supply chains, was shared with speakers and participants as was the IDSN [brief](#) and recommendations for UN and EU actors on addressing caste-hate speech in a global context.

Several panellists including Anita Ramasastry and Fernanda Hopenhaym, of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and Nora Götzmann of The Danish Institute for Human Rights, responded directly to IDSN's questions and noted the need to address caste discrimination and violence, calling caste a blind spot that must be acknowledged and tackled.

Speakers at all sessions repeatedly stressed the need to consult and actively engage with affected and marginalised communities, in remedy and the design of policies and tools meant to address human rights abuses in supply chains. This is also a key recommendation from IDSN when it comes to oppressed caste workers (including home workers) in global supply chains.

EU NGO Forum

Dalit rights defenders speak out on caste at the EU-NGO Forum



Economic, social and labour rights were the thematic headlines of the December 2021 EU-NGO Human Rights Forum, where three Dalit human rights defenders were featured as panellists, facilitated by IDS^N. Caste-related barriers to healthcare in Pakistan, post-covid economic and social recovery for Dalit workers in South Asia and building corporate accountability to respect human rights were among the key topics covered by the panellists.

The Forum, held under the heading 'Rebuilding better – a human rights-based recovery from the pandemic', was organised by the European Commission and the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN). Participants at the Forum included representatives from human rights NGOs, relevant experts from EU institutions, EU delegations, MEPs, EU Member States and international organisations, independent experts, as well as journalists.

Speaking on the panel on barriers to universal healthcare, Pirbhu Satyani, of the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, called on the EU to act on caste and religious based discrimination in Pakistan and strictly monitor the progress on financial transparency, anti-discrimination practices, equal opportunity, inclusion and democratic space for civil society and NGOs under the GSP+ agreement.

Mr. Satyani furthermore called for action to ensure that sanitation workers, many of whom are Dalits and Christian minorities, have access to regular health screening, provision of safety kits, health insurance, social security and financial compensation to address risks involved in their work.

Dalit rights defender and researcher, Samarpana Ramesh, spoke on the panel on promoting and implementing economic and social rights in the post-COVID recovery. She stressed the need for recovery efforts in relation to Dalit workers who lost their work and livelihoods as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns and effects.

Ms. Ramesh also called for EU corporations to implement measures to prevent and remedy caste and gender discrimination in supply chains in South Asia. Such measures could also include supporting Dalit women workers in factories to get organised into unions and supporting Dalit human rights defenders.

Similar issues were raised by R. Karuppusamy, Founder of the Rights Education And Development Centre (READ), speaking on the panel on corporate accountability. He explained to participants how poverty, gender and caste intersect as root causes of worker exploitation in the textile sector in India. Mr. Karuppusamy furthermore called for a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing caste related human rights abuses and ensuring corporate accountability. He also urged Governments to step up action to ensure the implementation and improvement of national education schemes to build better futures for caste affected communities.

IDS^N took part in many sessions at the Forum from the 7-8 December, learning and sharing with participants.

The recordings of the sessions are available [online](#).

Equality and Participation

In 2021, IDS^N facilitated and launched a multitude of initiatives to promote and ensure equality and participation for Dalit communities and rights defenders.

Equality and participation cuts across all of IDS^N's work and is therefore also reflected in the chapters on caste and gender justice and business and human rights. In this chapter, we highlight initiatives at a more general level or specific to health, poverty, access to justice, water and sanitation, as well as the launch of the IDS^N report on caste-hate speech and participation in key events.

EU-India human rights dialogue

Ahead of the European Union-India human rights dialogue in January, advocacy efforts were made towards the EU Delegation, the EEAS and Member States representations in India. A briefing was also shared highlighting key issues concerning Dalits and caste-based discrimination.

IDS^N contribution to European Parliament foreign affairs report

In April, IDS^N contributed with a joint submission to the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) [report](#) on India. The submission was issued jointly with the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and the report included five mentions of caste discrimination and Dalits. One article of the resolution specifically draws attention to the "issue of prevailing caste-based discrimination and the important issue of granting rights under the Forest Rights Act to Adivasi communities".

IDS^N input on caste equality in the context of the SDGs

In June 2021, IDS^N submitted input to the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities report in connection with the Human Rights Council's 47th Session, on the situation of minorities and the SDGs.

The IDS^N report highlighted that several UN Experts have underlined the importance of the 2030 Development Agenda to consider caste-affected groups and promote "tailored action to lift them out of poverty and close the inequality gap between them and the rest of society".

This includes the 2016 report on caste-based discrimination by same rapporteurship, concluding that discrimination on the basis of caste and analogous systems is a major cause of poverty, inequality and social exclusion of affected communities. The report also recommends that states should consider including caste specific indicators in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets address the situation of affected groups.

Dalit activists highlight caste discrimination at the European Development Days IDS^N stand

The European Development Days, in June 2021, virtually brought together thousands of participants from around the world, under the theme 'A green deal for a sustainable future'. This theme was expanded to include the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On this virtual platform IDS^N was chosen to display a stand at the Global Village. The Global Village was set up like an online agora and filled with innovative projects and ground-breaking reports from around the world. Participants were able to look around the stands, interact with the collaborators and make new connections through the interactive features.

IDS^N's stand was staffed by experts from South Asia – such as Monalika Tiwari and Amu Vinzuda from Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan, along with Bezwada Wilson from Safai Karmachari Andolan from India. These experts were able to engage with participants on a multitude of topics, such

Caste-hate speech report launched at UN event

In March 2021, IDSN launched the [report](#) 'Caste-hate speech: Addressing hate speech based on work and descent'. The report examines caste-hate speech with a particular emphasis on digital media. It is based on extensive research and offers numerous real-life examples of caste-hate speech and its relation to caste-hate crime.

The publication was launched during the March session of the UN Human Rights Council, at the [side-event](#) 'The Impact of Online Caste-Hate Speech'. The event was organised by IDSN International Associates the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Minority Rights Group (MRG), FORUM-ASIA and Human Rights Watch (HRW). The event discussed the various forms in which online caste-hate speech manifests, the gravity of such manifestations and the concrete means to combat it.

"This report is an admirable and well-researched exploration of a serious, but neglected, human rights issue. In particular, the report uncovers an alarming trend on social media platforms – the de facto normalisation of caste-hate speech as a means to oppress and humiliate Dalits."

Dr Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes, was a keynote speaker at the event. Panelists were Murali Shanmugavelan, researcher and author of the report, Beena Pallical (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India), Elaine Alam (Faces Pakistan), Riya Singh (Dalit Women Fight Collective, India), Anju Kandel (Jagaran Media Centre, Nepal) and Tamanna Singh Baraik (Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Minorities, Bangladesh). The event was moderated by Meena Varma, Executive Director of IDSN.

The report argues that global policymakers should consider caste a protected characteristic related to hate speech policies. It calls for the recognition and inclusion of caste in all international covenants related to human rights and hate speech. It also sets out action plans to mitigate hate speech in everyday conversations, increasingly mediated by digital platforms. It aims to set a policy agenda, and



raise public awareness and offers a number of key recommendations for addressing caste-hate speech. The report was followed up by an IDSN [briefing paper](#) on caste-hate speech aimed specifically at UN and EU actors.

"In Nepal, we face discrimination and humiliation offline and online and many caste crimes and violence are started through caste-hate speech. We are judged by our caste and when advocating for rights online we face severe backlash and threats"

Anju Kandel, Jagaran Media Center Nepal, speaking at the side-event.



Dalit families gathered at the local water tap in Nepal. Photo by Jakob Carlsen ©

as sanitation, manual scavenging and Dalit human rights. From Pakistan, Pirbhu Satyani, a former UN Minority Fellow, represented the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network. The stand received comments from EDD participants in the public chat box.

IDSN promoted the event and also published an [article](#) on IDSN's participation.

Follow-up by the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights on IDSN's ECOSOC status

During the Interactive Dialogue with the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights in September, Ilze Brands Kehris published a [follow-up](#) of IDSN's delayed process of ECOSOC accreditation.

The report mentioned the 25 consecutive deferrals by the NGO Committee and the presentation of this update was followed by the inclusion of IDSN's case in the oral statement of the International Service for Human Rights at the same interactive dialogue.

Call for strengthening caste-based discrimination governance at the UN

In October, during the 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Pradip Pariyar, from IDSN member organisation the Samata Foundation, highlighted the need for the UN system to keep engaged in eradicating caste-based discrimination. His [statement](#) was delivered on behalf of IMADR, IDSN's international associate.

"The UN human rights system should be firmly engaged in eradicating caste-based discrimination, which affects nearly 260 million individuals worldwide. The sad persistence of this type of discrimination challenges the formal prohibition of caste discrimination in many countries. Dalit women in particular suffer multiple discrimination at the intersection of caste and gender discrimination, including as targets of sexual violence and forced prostitution."

Pradip Pariyar, from IDSN member organisation Samata Foundation, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council

The statement called for the Advisory Committee to include the relevant UN standard, such as CERD's General Recommendation 29, the 2016 Study of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the many recommendations made in the context of the Universal Periodic Review to caste-affected countries, in its studies on racial discrimination.

IDSN takes part in UN SDG side-event

Also in October, the IDSN Executive Director was invited to speak at a virtual side-event at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Economic Participation of Minorities' and the UN Special Rapporteur's thematic report (on the SDGs). The event was organised jointly by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities, the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE HCNM) and the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York. Ms. Varma spoke of the need to address caste discrimination as it continues to be a key obstacle to making progress on key Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty calls for action on caste discrimination during Nepal visit

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, Olivier de Schutter, stressed the issue of caste-based discrimination, during his official visit to Nepal, in December 2021.

Having met Dalit representatives, including many from the IDSN membership, the Rapporteur highlighted several manifestations of stark inequalities entrenched in the persistent Nepali caste system, such as land issues, political participation, right to education and lack of implementation of the constitutional provisions that recognise the right to equality and special measures for Dalits and other minorities in the country.



India's health inequality severely affects Dalits

In 2021, Oxfam released a report on healthcare in India illustrating the stark caste divides in health in the country. IDSN promoted the findings through communications and advocacy channels and published an [article](#) with key extracts from the report.

Dalits and members of India's other marginalised communities are lagging behind more privileged groups in terms of health and access to healthcare. The following indicators mentioned in the Oxfam report illustrate the differences in the health situation of Dalits and members of dominant castes.

- On average, a woman from a dominant caste lives 15 years longer than a Dalit woman.
- Two out of three households in the general category have access to improved, non-shared sanitation facilities, while the percentage for Dalit households is 37.
- The literacy rate for women in the general category is 81 compared to appr. 62 percent for Dalit women.
- Infant mortality rates (IMR) among Dalits are significantly higher than those of more privileged groups. The Dalit IMR is appr. 45 (deaths in 1,000) compared to 32 for the general category.
- The number of stunted children in Dalit households is consistently high compared to other castes. The percentage in Dalit households is almost 43 compared to 31 in general category households.

“Though banned, caste-based and ethnicity-based discrimination remain a reality in social life, and it is a major factor explaining the perpetuation of poverty.”

Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty

In his [statement](#), he emphasised that, although Dalits constitute at least 13.6 per cent of the total population 42 per cent of Dalits live under the poverty line. He also mentioned that persistence of social discrimination is the primary factor underlying poverty.

IDSN worked together with its Nepalese members in the preparation of the mission to Nepal, including by submitting a joint [input](#) document prior to the visit. IDSN also published and distributed [news](#) on the report through all IDSN communication channels.

UN slavery expert visits Sri Lanka

Also in December, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Tomoya Obokata, visited Sri Lanka and raised concern over caste-based discrimination affecting the lives of oppressed castes.

“I am concerned by these instances of discrimination and abuse towards the oppressed populations, as they limit the opportunity of members of oppressed castes to access decent work, thereby increasing the risk of contemporary forms of slavery.”

Tomoya Obokata, UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

In his [statement](#), The Rapporteur noted the persistence of caste-based discrimination in the country, particularly in the northern province, in which many who belong to oppressed castes are unable to have access to land and carry out agriculture or water and irrigation facilities.

He noted with concern workplace harassment including by public officials, which affects oppressed castes disproportionately. Moreover, he noted that the issue of caste is silenced and there is reluctance on the part of authorities to tackle it. IDSN offered [input](#) ahead of the visit and published an [article](#) on the outcome of the visit.

New report and symposium charts pathways towards access to justice for Dalit defenders in Pakistan

The symposium ‘Challenges to effective legal remedies for Dalit and Minorities’ defenders in Pakistan and proposed solution to those challenges’ was organised by the International Commission on Dalit Rights (ICDR) to discuss and launch the ICDR Pakistan report of the Dalit Justice Defenders Reports.

The Pakistan report was drafted and presented by Pirbhu Satyani from IDSN member the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN). Participants and speakers discussed issues of Pakistani Dalit rights defenders and lawyers and recommended pathways to improve access to justice for Dalits in Pakistan. IDSN also reported on the symposium in an [article](#) on the IDSN website.

IDSN participates in global forum on caste and sanitation

In November, IDSN participated in the Sanitation Workers Forum where the links between caste and hazardous forms of sanitation work were highlighted by speakers.

Participants at the forum urged that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety and dignity of millions of sanitation workers worldwide – and ensure social protections. There was interactive participation at the event by IDSN staff and membership and IDSN published an [article](#) highlighting the contributions of Dalit activists and the outcome of the Forum.



Dalit women in India. Photo by Sean Hawkey ©

Organisation and Networking

Engaging with the IDSN membership

Collaboration and engagement with IDSN members, associates and affiliates forms the basis of all of IDSN's work. In addition to the collaboration on specific events, initiatives, submissions and reports, IDSN also checks in regularly with the network to get an overview of priorities and possibilities for joint efforts.

The membership mapping efforts that started in 2019 were continued in 2021 with the IDSN membership coordinator speaking to members across South Asia.

Throughout the year the IDSN Membership Coordinator also participated in many national or regional conferences and events organised by IDSN members bringing valuable feedback and input on these events.

Expanding the network

In addition to engaging with the existing membership IDSN stepped up work to expand the network. The IDSN Membership Coordinator and Executive Director spoke with many prospective members and affiliates to explore their possible future engagement with IDSN and determine the ways in which working together could be of mutual benefit.

Research was also undertaken to pro-actively engage with new organisations in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, where IDSN had fewer members.

These efforts resulted in the welcoming of new members and affiliates from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and India to IDSN in 2021. This expansion of the network brings new expertise to IDSN and enhances future opportunities to engage and input in advocacy and awareness raising.

Meet the new IDS^N members and affiliates

In 2021, IDS^N was thrilled to welcome new members and affiliates to our network, bringing each their unique and valuable set of skills and insight. We are delighted to introduce them here.

BANGLADESH

[Parittran](#)

Founded in 1993, by a group of Dalit students, Parittran brings experience and know-how on the situation of Dalit communities in Bangladesh and the need for action. The movement, formally an NGO, is a Dalit social action group working to improve the lives of Dalits in Bangladesh through advocacy, empowerment and capacity building efforts. Parittran is also dedicated to building Dalit youth leadership.

SRI LANKA

[Human Development Organization](#) (HDO)

HDO's foundational blocks were laid in 1992 and the organization brings a long history of knowledge and engagement with caste discrimination in Sri Lanka to IDS^N. The organisation works for a just and equitable Sri Lanka and seeks to fulfil its mission through people centred participatory and sustainable development projects around the environment, human rights and gender balance for social change. HDO works directly with underprivileged communities in Sri Lanka.

NEPAL

[Association For Dalit Women's Advancement of Nepal](#)

ADWAN was founded in 1998, by a group of Dalit women, to empower disadvantaged women through a combination of education and economic empowerment. ADWAN supports girls and women of Dalit and marginalized groups with education, economic empowerment for better livelihood and sensitisation on human rights to help them escape from inequality, oppression and poverty. The process of enhancing women's empowerment directly affects their life with education, awareness of human rights and skills training to have access to quality decent work.

[Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources](#) (DANAR)

DANAR was founded in 2009, by Dalits, women and other excluded forest activists in Nepal and brings unique knowledge, on the nexus of caste and socially inclusive natural resource management. DANAR's mission is to ensure Dalit community representation and participation in access to natural resources and biodiversity. It aims to influence policies and programmes for equitable natural

resource management and distribution, by promoting justice, social inclusion and good governance through advocacy and empowerment.

[Samata Foundation](#)

Samata Foundation founded in 2009, brings solid expertise, research, and evidence-based advocacy, on Dalit human rights in Nepal. The foundation engages in research both empirical and policy, and informed advocacy for the rights of Dalits. It operates from the outset that real change can only be brought by producing critical youth mass of Dalits and non-Dalits, disseminating knowledge, encouraging civic participation and supporting Dalit defenders to become leaders of the next generation.

PAKISTAN

[Center for Law & Justice](#) (CLJ)

The CLJ was founded in 2011, and brings key expertise on the situation of marginalised groups in Pakistan, including Dalits, religious minorities and sanitation workers. CLJ aims to ensure free and fair access to human rights for the underprivileged and marginalised communities in Pakistan. The organisation engages in legal, legislative, and cultural issues through research, fact-finding, litigation, advocacy and legal aid, and engaging the community and other stakeholders. The Center also runs the internationally recognised campaign 'Sweepers are Superheroes', which seeks dignity and safety for sanitation workers.

INDIA

[The Blue Club](#)

The Blue Club was started in 2015 to amplify the voices of marginalised women and sexual and gender minorities. With content on topics such as mental health, the #metoo movement, trans women's rights etc. TBC's work goes a long way in providing a platform for society to think critically about the 'everydayness' of caste and gender discrimination and challenge the systems and hierarchies that underpin this. TBC also launched a unique Media Fellowship program for Dalit Women and LGBTQIA+ persons on community journalism as an important tool for change.

[National Dalit Christian Watch](#) (NDCW) *joined in 2020

NDCW aims to eliminate 'caste' from the Christian Church and ensure 'dignity, equality, space and justice' to Dalit Christians within the Church and its domains. The organisation brings specific knowledge on the issues of marginalised Dalit Christians in India to IDS^N working on inclusion and representation of Dalits at all levels of the Church, the need for caste-based reservations and quotas for Dalit Christians in India and leadership building.

Website and newsletter

Throughout the year, forty-six news articles were written and published on the IDS N website. The articles cover developments within IDS N's thematic areas and news from countries affected by caste discrimination. They are based on IDS N's work and input from network members, associates and affiliates.

The news articles, as well as other news curated from the broader network, were published in IDS N's newsletters throughout 2021. At the end of 2021, IDS N switched to a new newsletter platform called Revue, that has increased integration with IDS N's Twitter channels. The newsletters have a varied readership - including UN and EU decision-makers, academics and human rights defenders from a wide range of countries. 2021 saw a 5 per cent increase in the number of subscribers to the IDS N newsletter.

The IDS N website was visited by over 66,000 users in 2021 with more than 126,000 pageviews. Visits from over 180 different countries cement the IDS N website's position as the leading global resource on caste-based discrimination. The top-ten countries drawing visitors to the IDS N website in 2021 were India, Nepal, US, China, UK, Canada, Pakistan, Philippines, Australia and Germany.

In 2021, IDS N posted 125 new entries to the IDS N online documentation database on caste discrimination, where entries are cross-referenced and searchable according to theme, institution, country and year, as well as other relevant parameters. IDS N also updated the country profiles on Bangladesh and Pakistan and prepared for the updates on the India and Nepal pages through wide consultations with IDS N members in the respective countries.

Social media and videos

IDS N's social media channels continue to form a base for both internal and external communications, with members, associates and affiliates interacting regularly via social media and cross promoting news and documentation.

In 2021, IDS N's Twitter followers rose by 31 per cent compared to 2020, and IDS N's tweets had over 394,000

Caste and media

International Dalit Journalist Network launched

A global network of Dalit journalists from across the world was launched in April by IDS N members, to address the need to ensure better representation of Dalit voices in the mediascapes of countries where caste discrimination occurs.

The International Dalit Journalist Network (IDJN) elected Rem Bishwokarma of IDS N member organisation, Jagaran Media Centre, as General Secretary.

"We will work towards including all the Dalit journalists who have been working actively in different parts of the globe," said Mr. Bishwokarma.

"Caste-based discrimination and untouchability is not only the problem of Nepal. Such discrimination is rampant across different parts of the world. To end such problems, we have developed the international network of Dalit journalists."

impressions over the course of the year, a 74 per cent rise in relation to the previous year. Engagement with IDS N's tweets also rose by more than 60 per cent, with over 1200 retweets and 2000 likes on average per month.

IDS N's Facebook followers rose to 10,269 by the end of 2021. The IDS N 'Caste and Colourism' debate Facebook video also continues to garner views with a total of over 43,000 views at the end of 2021.

On IDS N's YouTube channel views of IDS N's online video on Dalit women rose to a total of over 220,000 views, and views of the general IDS N video on caste discrimination rose to over 96,000 views. The original "I'm Dalit how are you?" video also continued to prove popular with a total of over 229,000 views.

Governance

IDSN's work in 2021 was steered by the IDSN five-year [strategy](#) adopted at the end of 2018, and Governance adhered to IDSN's statutes.

Board members are actively involved in many of IDSN's activities and offer input and guidance. The IDSN Board held four virtual meetings throughout the year in February, July, August and December, as well as several other ad hoc meetings as required.

The gender composition of IDSN's board, as of the 31 December 2021, is five women and four men. There are three board members from India, two from Nepal, one from Pakistan, one from Japan, one from Germany and one from Norway.

Secretariat

The Secretariat team welcomed Emma Achilli, who joined in October 2021, to undertake the role of EU Advocacy Consultant, based in Brussels.

IDSN Secretariat staff as of 31 December 2021:

- Executive Director
Meena Varma
- Head of Communications
Maria Brink Schleimann
- Programme and Finance Officer
Madeleine Cowper
- UN Advocacy Consultant
Paulo Lugon Arantes
- EU Advocacy Consultant
Emma Achilli
- Membership Coordinator
Ritwajit Das
- Bookkeeper
Peter Soby Petersen

Aside from the Programme and Finance Officer, 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 2021: the Norwegian Human Rights Foundation, Bread for the World (Germany) and those who made individual private donations through PayPal.

IDSN continued fundraising efforts in 2021 in order to ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of the organisation.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2021

Profit and loss

	2021 DKK	2021 EURO	2020 DKK
Opening balance¹	791,451.48	106,011.69	1,152,503.07
Income			
Norwegian Human Rights Fund	667,895.31	89,461.85	1,024,800.00
Brot für die Welt	1,254,575.10	169,000.00	706,530.48
Other income	59,966.54		
Total	1,982,436.95	265,539.33	1,731,330.48
Expenditure	2,310,077.97	309,425.50	2,092,382.07
Result	- 327,641.02	-43,886.18	-361,051.59
Balance	463,810.46	62,125.52	791,451.48

Balance statement

	2021 DKK	2021 EURO	2020 DKK
Assets			
Cash at bank at 31.12.	1,051,282.68	140,815.02	959,144.19
Other assets			
Rent deposit	13,326.00	1,784.96	13,326.00
Petty cash	1,649.32	220.92	2,207.32
Outstanding accounts	74,417.10	9,967.87	24,417.10
Total other assets	89,392.42	11,973.75	39,950.42
Liabilities			
Balance Master Card account	-1,134.10	-151.91	-1,411.58
Compulsory holiday payment fund	-5,512.85	-738.42	-5,802.72
Outstanding Accounts ²	-155,611.40	-20,843.51	-200,429.83
BfdW funds for 2022	-96,501.60	-13,000.00	
NHRF fund for 2022	-418,104.69	-56,003.41	
Total Liabilities	-676,864.64	-90,737.26	-207,643.13
Balance carried forward	463,810.46	62,125.52	791,451.48

The financial statements are presented in Danish kroner.

For reasons of comparison, amounts in Euro are presented, using a fixed exchange rate based on a monthly average from Infocore: 7,4657

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

Notes:

1 Opening balance is in accordance with accounts for 2020

2 Consist of audit, annual report, insurance, tax for 2021 to be paid in 2022



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Connect with IDSN



Sign up for updates on:
www.idsn.org/newsletter



facebook.com/dalitnetwork



twitter.com/idsnupdates



youtube.com/idsnvideo

Affiliates

- Association For Dalit Women's Advancement of Nepal
- Center for Law & Justice - Pakistan
- Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources - Nepal
- Dalit Welfare Organisation - Nepal
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies – Sri Lanka
- National Dalit Christian Watch - India
- NYU School of Law's Center for Human Rights and Global Justice
- Parittran - Bangladesh
- Social Awareness Society for Youths - India
- The Blue Club - India

Members

Nepal

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

Pakistan

- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network

Bangladesh

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

Sri Lanka

- Human Development Organization

India

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

Solidarity Networks - Europe

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

International Associates

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



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 organisations in caste-affected countries. IDSN 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. IDSN 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.