

Recommendations for the 58th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (24th February – 4th April 2025)

In connection with their participation in the 58th Human Rights Council session, Member States are encouraged to consider the ongoing and systemic practice of discrimination based on work and descent, also known as caste-based discrimination, affecting over 260 million people globally.

Caste discrimination is found in various regions of the world, including Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe. The issue has been frequently addressed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Procedures. Nonetheless, more needs to be done to ensure that caste-based discrimination is recognised by the Council and mainstreamed into UN Resolutions.

In this regard, we call on the UN human rights mechanisms and Member States to work towards the endorsement and adoption by the UN Human Rights Council of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, as well as the OHCHR's Guidance Tool on Descent-based Discrimination.

In the context of the reports presented at the 58th Council session, IDSN recommends States to pay particular attention to caste-based discrimination to ensure it is included on par with other forms of discrimination in thematic Human Rights Council resolutions.

ITEM 1 – ORGANISATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL MATTER

Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming, on the theme “Thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (HRC res.16/21 and 57/4) – 24 March, 16:00 – 18:00.

Caste-affected countries in South Asia remain deeply patriarchal societies where women and girls are often oppressed by men and socially restricted 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 and therefore this type of discrimination requires specific attention. This has been widely recognised by the UN human rights mechanisms.

Dalit women are subjected to caste-based discrimination and human rights abuses that marginalise and impoverish them, including sexual violence, trafficking, forced marriage, unequal political representation and participation, and lack of access to education, health and livelihood. Additionally, Dalit women are denied justice whilst offenders often enjoy impunity. Dalit women who face further intersectional discrimination, due to sexuality, age or disability are further marginalised.

Dalit women are leading the way by standing up for their rights, however they require global solidarity and justice to catalyse their access to rights and dignity.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Participate in the panel discussion by specifically engaging with, and raising awareness of, the necessity for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration to directly address the intersectional caste-based discrimination faced by Dalit women and girls.

ITEM 3 - PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Economic, social and cultural rights

Panel discussion on the realisation of the rights to work and to social security in the informal economy (HRC res. 55/9) – 7 March, 09:30 – 11:30.

Dalits face systemic exclusion from equitable employment and social security within the informal economy. Due to extreme poverty and social discrimination, many Dalits are forced into exploitative, violent and hazardous labour conditions, including bonded labour, where their work serves as collateral for debts. Dalits make up the majority of bonded labourers in South Asia. When they assert their rights, many face violence and hostility from dominant caste groups, reinforcing their marginalization.

IDSN's Dalit Discrimination Check demonstrates that Dalits are systematically paid lower wages than non-Dalit workers for equal work and are often denied social protection or career progression. Many Dalits are subjected to intersectional discrimination and human rights violations in the informal sector; manual scavenging, widely regarded as a contemporary form of slavery, is predominantly carried out by Dalit women, and Dalit children are often trafficked for child labour purposes.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Participate in the panel discussion by engaging in practical and concrete measures to advance protection of Dalits and minorities suffering caste-based discrimination in the informal economy, such as;

a) National and local governments, corporations, labour groups, and international labour, financial, and development organizations should collaborate to ensure concrete mechanisms for the prevention, identification and eradication of exploitative labour arrangements and the implementation of rehabilitation schemes for forced, bonded and child labourers with special attention to affected communities;

b) Enforce legal protections and ensure access to justice for Dalit workers facing workplace violence, intimidation, or retaliation, ensuring their safety, dignity, and access to justice without fear of oppression;

c) Implement bans, rehabilitation programs, and alternative livelihood opportunities to end the caste-based exploitation of Dalit women in manual scavenging;

d) Mandate equal pay for Dalits and extend social protections like healthcare, pensions, and unemployment benefits.

Civil and political rights

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief – 5 March, 11:30 – 17:30.

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief will present a report on the intersections between the right to freedom of religion or belief and the prohibition of torture and other cruel,

inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (A/HRC/58/49). The Special Rapporteur highlights that women and members of minority groups are disproportionately affected by the violation of the prohibition of torture in the name of certain religious laws or interpretations (para 5).

However, the wider disproportionate impact felt by Dalits at this intersection must be specifically attended to. Dalits, particularly women and girls, face intersecting violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief and protection from torture and cruel treatment. In South Asia, Dalit girls from Hindu and Christian minorities are disproportionately subjected to abductions, forced conversions and coerced marriages, often accompanied by physical, sexual and psychological abuse. They are excluded from religious practices, relegated to degrading labour, and face systemic barriers to justice due to police negligence and judicial biases. Forced conversions and marriages serve as mechanisms of psychological torture, isolating victims from their families and communities. Fear of violence prevents Dalit families from sending girls to school, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

IDSN recommends that States:

- **Participate in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief by engaging in practical and concrete measures to protect Dalits that prioritise the need to (a) implement existing legislation; (b) facilitate Dalit access to justice and reparations.**

Rights of peoples and specific groups and individuals

Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 12 March – 09:30 – 17:30.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children will present their annual report, which focuses on the increase in trafficking in children (A/HRC/58/19). The Special Representative states that:

“There is significant demand for trafficked children’s labour and services across various sectors...The children affected include scheduled caste and tribal children in South Asia who are trafficked to distant cities to work in manufacturing” (para 62).

IDSN underscores that the trafficking of scheduled caste and tribal children in South Asia extends beyond labour exploitation in manufacturing. Dalit children, due to their extreme socio-economic vulnerability and caste-based discrimination, are also trafficked for bonded labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and forced marriages. These children face systemic barriers to justice, as law enforcement often ignores their plight or colludes with traffickers, leaving them trapped in cycles of abuse. Traffickers exploit caste hierarchies to target Dalit children, knowing their families lack the resources or societal support to seek redress, perpetuating this grave human rights violation.

IDSN recommends that States:

- **Participate in the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, ensuring the application of the Special Representative’s proposed collective actions to Dalit children. IDSN welcomes the Representative’s three interlinked factors, that address: (a) the increased vulnerabilities of children; (b) the growing global demand for exploitative services; and (c) the impunity of perpetrators.**

Presentation of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights report on Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, 14 March – 14:30 – 17:30.

The High Commissioner highlighted two of IDSN’s events in their report:

“In September, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues participated in a side-event on the theme of ‘Let’s talk about caste’ organized by the International Dalit Solidarity Network during the fifty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council. The aim of the side event, which brought together Dalit women human rights defenders from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, was to highlight the need to explicitly address caste discrimination as a root cause of widespread human rights violations. The Special Rapporteur called on United Nations human rights mechanisms to recognize caste as a key factor in addressing human rights abuses. He further emphasized that, in addition to having anti-discrimination legislation, it was important to work directly with Dalits and to ensure that their human rights could be exercised in practice” (para 32).

“In August, OHCHR collaborated with the International Dalit Solidarity Network and the Asia Dalit Rights Forum to examine access to justice by persons from descent-based communities in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka. The workshop produced an outcome document offering good practices to strengthen and/or establish structures, policies and practices that provide access to effective justice mechanisms to persons from descent-based communities” (para 33).

The High Commissioner also outlined further work by OHCHR to challenge descent- and work-based discrimination:

“In October, OHCHR presented avenues to challenge descent- and work-based discrimination under the United Nations human rights mechanisms at a meeting on the theme of “Addressing work and descent-based discrimination against women: a prerequisite to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration” convened in the margins of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting. The event spotlighted the challenges faced by women from communities discriminated against on the basis of work and descent, such as the Haratin, Roma and Dalit women across the ECE region. Participants discussed actionable strategies to ensure that women from communities discriminated against on the basis of work and descent were included in global frameworks and policies” (para 34).

IDSN recommends that States:

- **Follow up on IDSN’s side-event by participating in the debate with the High Commissioner, engaging with IDSN’s following recommendations;**
 - a) **Ensure an explicit focus on caste, placing a greater priority on addressing violence and discrimination against Dalit women and children, recognising that caste-based exclusion affects millions;**
 - b) **Call for countries affected by caste-based discrimination to enact legislation, or to effectively enforce existing legislation, on the prohibition of caste-based discrimination, with disaggregated data on cases and benchmarks, in consultation with the affected communities;**
 - c) **Call for countries affected by caste-based discrimination to strengthen legal protections for Dalits to ensure stronger legal frameworks against caste-based violence, particularly where it intersects with gender and labour exploitation;**
 - d) **Support the proposal for an international conference on eliminating caste-based discrimination and advocate for adopting the UN Principles and Guidelines on work and descent-based discrimination.**
- **Following up on the workshop held by OHCHR, IDSN and the Asia Dalit Rights Forum, participate in the debate with the High Commissioner, and echo the calls from OHCHR for the adoption of a wide range of measures designed to implement existing legislation which already provide for non-discrimination. [See the principles document.](#)**

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, 6 March – 09:30 – 12:30.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders will present a report on human rights defenders working in isolated, remote and rural contexts (A/HRC/58/53).

In the report, the Special Rapporteur outlines that women human rights defenders promoting the rights of minorities face greater discrimination in rural areas than in cities (para 40). This is exemplified through a case of discrimination faced by a Nepali women's rights organisation, established in a rural area to support local Dalit communities. Following repeated discrimination by their landlord, due to their hiring of Dalit staff (para 41), the police intervened on behalf of the women, forcing a public apology from the landlord. Following the event, the police actively promoted messages against caste-based discrimination in the community (para 42).

IDSN commends Nepal for this positive intervention and urges its replication in other regions. However, such actions remain the exception rather than the norm. Across South Asia, Dalit women human rights defenders in rural areas continue to face systemic caste and gender-based violence, harassment, and threats, often with minimal or no state protection. Many perpetrators, including influential local elites, act with impunity, and law enforcement frequently fails to intervene. While promoting anti-caste discrimination messages is vital, structural reforms, targeted legal protections, and community-level education are essential to dismantle deeply entrenched caste biases.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Participate in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders by engaging in practical and concrete measures to protect and empower Dalit human rights defenders, such as;

a) Prosecuting perpetrators targeting Dalit defenders, ensuring accountability, and ending systemic impunity in law enforcement and judicial systems;

b) Calling for countries affected by caste-based discrimination to establish and enforce protection mechanisms for Dalit human rights defenders, addressing threats, violence, and harassment from state and non-state actors;

c) Promoting recognition, resources, and enabling environments for Dalit defenders, particularly in rural areas, to combat caste-based discrimination and violence effectively.

Interrelation of human rights and human rights thematic issues

Presentation of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights report on the annual panel discussion on human rights and climate change, 14 March – 14:30 – 17:30.

OHCHR will present a report on the annual panel discussion on human rights and climate change, which focused on ensuring livelihood resilience in the context of the risk of loss and damage relating to the adverse effects of climate change for achieving progressively the full realization of all human rights and ways forward to address the challenges thereto on the basis of equity and climate justice.

The report noted that several annual panel participants stated that loss and damage related to climate change has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable. Other participants further stressed that specific attention must be paid to these groups and that discussion must be inclusive of these groups.

Dalit communities face disproportionate impacts from climate change due to their socio-economic marginalization and exclusion from disaster relief and adaptation measures. Living in vulnerable areas with inadequate infrastructure, Dalits are more likely to experience displacement, loss of livelihoods and health risks.

IDSN recommends that States:

- **Participate in the dialogue with OHCHR, calling for Dalits to be specifically attended to and Dalit human rights defenders to be actively empowered to participate all discussions on human rights and climate change.**
- **Ensure that climate justice frameworks explicitly address caste-based vulnerabilities, guaranteeing inclusive policies and equitable access to climate resilience and recovery resources.**

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, 14 March, 09:30 – 17:30.

The Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment will present a report on the ocean and human rights (A/HRC/58/59). The report recognises that marginalised communities are largely, and disproportionality impacted by anthropogenic ocean damage and the impacts of climate change.

Further to the report, IDSN stresses the need to attend to the needs and situation of specific marginalised communities. Dalit fishing communities are marginalised, often working in informal and precarious conditions, lacking recognition, legal protections, and access to resources such as fishing licenses and coastal land rights. This informal status exacerbates their socio-economic vulnerabilities. Additionally, rising sea levels and frequent coastal flooding disproportionately affect Dalit fishing communities, as they often reside in low-lying, disaster-prone areas. These events lead to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and further marginalization, with limited access to government relief and rehabilitation programs due to caste-based discrimination.

IDSN recommends that States:

- **Participate in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by engaging in practical and concrete measures to address caste-based inequalities in coastal and environmental governance, such as;**
 - a) **Integrating caste-sensitive approaches into climate adaptation and disaster response policies, ensuring equitable access to relief and resilience programs for Dalit fishing communities;**
 - b) **Formalising and protecting Dalit fishing livelihoods, ensuring fair wages, social protections and inclusion in sustainable development frameworks;**
 - c) **Prioritising Dalit communities in coastal management, relocation, and housing programs to address displacement risks and ensure equitable land and resource access.**

ITEM 5

Report on the Forum on Minority Issues, 21 March - 14:30 – 17:30.

The Forum on Minority Issues held its Seventeenth session on “*Minority representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses*”. IDSN facilitated the participation of two delegates from India and Nepal. IDSN’s delegates called for action on caste-based discrimination and exclusion. Their contributions underscored the urgency of combating caste discrimination and amplified marginalised voices globally.

A Dalit human rights defender from Nepal emphasised the need for Dalit inclusion in political and public spaces, highlighting the barriers faced by Dalit women. He made the following recommendations;

- a) Political parties should promote Dalit Gender Balance candidates in direct elections, from local to federal levels;
- b) Nepal must implement Business and Human Rights policies with a focus on minority rights and Dalit Communities considered as stakeholders;
- c) Enforce anti-discrimination laws to end caste-based practices;
- d) Ensure at least two Dalits are included in every Provincial to Federal council of ministers;
- e) Promote Dalit Communities in leadership roles in every public space e.g., The Internal Political party, the National Commission, judiciary, and other ambassadors' appointments;
- f) Adopt zero-tolerance policies in all state institutions towards caste-based discrimination.

A Dalit human rights defender from India addressed the pervasive problem of caste-based hate speech on social media, calling for stronger regulatory measures and culturally informed solutions. He strongly recommended that all governments and businesses recognize caste-based hate speech as a specific form of hate speech. To achieve affective implementation, technology companies must invest in culturally informed AI and expand their teams of local and affected experts. The delegate also highlighted the good practice demonstrated by READ, an Indian NGO, who empower Dalit women through educating them on their rights on sexual harassment in the workplace.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Participate in the General Debate in order to address the above recommendations, including by increasing specific targeted funds, exchanging good practices in human rights education and ensuring equality-based humanitarian aid, in close consultation with Dalit communities, leaders, and their organizations.

ITEM 9. RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED FORMS OF INTOLERANCE, FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DURBAN DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

General Debate on ITEM 9, 27 March – 16:30 – 17:30, 28 March – 09:30 – 12:30.

Caste 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 'lesser human beings', 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups. They are considered to be 'untouchable' and subjected to so-called 'untouchability practices' in both public and private spheres. Dalits - formerly known as 'untouchables' - are often forcibly assigned the most dirty, menial and hazardous jobs, and many are subjected to forced and bonded labour. Due to exclusion practiced by both state and non-state actors, they have limited access to resources, services and development, keeping most Dalits in severe poverty. Despite policy development and new legislation in some countries, fundamental challenges remain in all caste-affected countries.

Even when the motto "leaving no one behind" is praised by the international community, persons affected by caste discrimination are *de facto* excluded from global calls, such as the SDGs. Dalits are often *de facto* excluded from decision making and meaningful participation in public and civil life. Lack of special legislation banning caste discrimination or lack of implementation of legislation, due to dysfunctional systems of justice 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.

The progress that has been made is, to a large extent, a consequence of the tireless work of Dalit civil society groups in South Asia. They have also – through IDSN and by other means – managed to place caste discrimination firmly on the international human rights agenda. UN bodies and EU institutions are paying increasing attention to this issue.

The division of a society into castes is a global phenomenon not exclusively practised within any particular religion or belief system. In South Asia, caste discrimination is traditionally rooted in the Hindu caste system. However, caste systems and the ensuing discrimination have spread into Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh communities. They are also found in Africa, other parts of Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific and in Diaspora communities.

IDSN has monitored the growing recognition of caste as a form of racial discrimination within the UN system, through the Special Rapporteurs' studies, the UPR, treaty-bodies, and other relevant mechanisms, reinforcing the existence of a solid international practice in international law. The relevant documents are organised in a comprehensive [compilation](#), available online.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Participate in the General Debate under Item 9 and amplify the call of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Racism for a strengthened recognition of caste discrimination as a form of racial discrimination within the UN family.**
- Promote a greater integration of persons affected by caste in the 2030 Agenda, vivifying and dynamizing the “leaving no one behind” principle, thus allowing persons affected by caste concrete opportunities of escaping poverty, marginalization, gender discrimination and other human rights violations intersecting with caste.**
- Plead that the relevant mechanism of follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action place attention to caste-based discrimination as one manifestation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related form of intolerance.**

Please note that some HRC58 reports have yet to be published but could prove relevant. An overview of all reports for this session can be found [here](#).

For more recommendations on caste discrimination within the UN framework see the [draft United Nations Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent](#) (2009)

For a full compilation of references to caste-based discrimination in UN human rights bodies see: [IDSN compilation of UN reference to caste discrimination](#).

Launched in March 2017, by the OHCHR, [Guidance tool on descent-based discrimination: key challenges and strategic approaches to combat caste-based and analogous forms of discrimination](#) offers concrete suggestions for actions to address caste-based discrimination in caste affected countries.

Published in November 2017, [IDSN Roadmap](#) to the OHCHR Guidance tool on Descent-based discrimination offers a simplified overview of the above Guidance tool.