

Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

IDSN input for the report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues on the contribution of the UN to the full realization of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) 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 national platforms in caste-affected countries.

1. How has IDSN interacted with UN entities, funds, programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations regarding minority issues? Please specify in each case which organization, agency or programme IDSN interacted with, when, and in which context?

Successive Special Rapporteurs have acknowledged that caste-based discrimination, particularly as it affects Dalits, falls within the scope of minority rights. IDSN has been instrumental in bringing this issue to the fore within UN institutions and procedures, actively engaging with various UN bodies, agencies and mechanisms to promote the inclusion of caste-related concerns in the UN's political and programmatic frameworks.

IDSN has maintained longstanding collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Most recently, in 2024, IDSN participated in a consultation co-hosted by OHCHR in Bangkok, which examined barriers to justice for Dalit communities in South Asia and laid the groundwork for increased attention to caste-based discrimination within the UN system¹. This was preceded by a similar initiative in Kathmandu in 2023, where OHCHR representatives, government officials and civil society stakeholders convened to create a youth-driven platform for change to address systemic caste-based discrimination².

In 2022, IDSN co-organised a virtual event with OHCHR focusing on business-related human rights abuses linked to caste discrimination, which explored how caste intersects with corporate responsibility frameworks³. During the COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR and IDSN co-

¹ IDSN News, *UN workshop sheds light on barriers to justice for Dalits in South Asia*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2024. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/un-workshop-sheds-light-on-barriers-to-justice-for-dalits-in-south-asia/>.

² IDSN News, *Youth at the forefront: Kathmandu events boosts advocacy to end caste/descent-based discrimination*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/youth-at-the-forefront-kathmandu-event-boosts-advocacy-to-end-caste-descent-based-discrimination/>.

³ IDSN News, *Leave no-one behind: Addressing business-related human rights issues and exclusion of communities on the basis of caste and descent*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2022. Accessible at:

hosted a global webinar entitled “*When language excludes and discriminates*”, examining how terminology and rhetoric perpetuate caste-based exclusion⁴. These events have furthered the global understanding of descent-based discrimination and its intersection with other rights issues.

In 2018, IDSN supported the development and promotion of the Declaration for the Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, adopted during a consultation co-organised by OHCHR in Osaka⁵.

Through the Human Rights Council (HRC) mechanisms, IDSN has engaged extensively with Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review. IDSN has regularly submitted stakeholder reports to UPR processes and made oral interventions during Human Rights Council sessions. IDSN and its partners have ensured the inclusion of caste-related recommendations in numerous HRC outputs. Moreover, IDSN has contributed to side events at HRC sessions, including sessions dedicated to violence against Dalit women, and participated actively in the UN Forum on Minority Issues and the Forum on Business and Human Rights⁶.

IDSN was actively involved in the Beijing+25 CSO Regional Forum, co-hosting a workshop addressing caste and gender discrimination⁷. The Network and its members continued to engage in this process through the Beijing+30 consultations. Furthermore, IDSN participated in the Global Consultation on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in providing access to remedy for business-related abuses⁸.

Additionally, IDSN has contributed to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development by providing inputs and highlighting the structural exclusion of caste-affected communities from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Do you have information on UN activities specifically addressing caste-based discrimination issues? If yes, please specify.

<https://idsn.org/leave-no-one-behind-addressing-business-related-human-rights-issues-and-exclusion-of-communities-on-the-basis-of-caste-and-descent/>.

⁴ IDSN News, *IDSN co-organises global OHCHR webinar “When language excludes and discriminates”*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2022. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/idsn-co-organises-global-ohchr-webinar-when-language-excludes-and-discriminates/>.

⁵ IDSN News, *Declaration for the Elimination of Descent-Based Discrimination*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2018. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/declaration-for-the-elimination-of-descent-based-discrimination-2018/>.

⁶ *IDSN Annual Reports*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, nd. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/about-us/what-we-do/annual-reports/>.

⁷ IDSN News, *IMADR and IDSN joint workshop on strategies to tackle caste and gender discrimination held at Beijing +25 forum*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2019. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/successful-workshop-on-strategies-to-tackle-caste-and-gender-discrimination-held-at-beijing-25-regional-cso-forum/>.

⁸ IDSN News, *IDSN Participates at UN Global Consultation on Business and Human Rights*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2019. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/idsn-participates-at-un-global-consultation-on-business-and-human-rights/>.

A milestone in UN recognition came with the release of the OHCHR Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination in 2017⁹. This document provides a comprehensive roadmap for UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and Resident Coordinators (RCs) to address caste and analogous systems of discrimination. The tool offers strategic approaches and best practices aimed at enabling inclusive development and compliance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities. Despite its importance, the tool remains underutilised. Few Common Country Analyses (CCA) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) explicitly reference caste discrimination, highlighting a significant implementation gap.

UNDP has addressed caste issues through the co-publication of an Outcome Document, following the co-hosted 2024 Bangkok workshop on access to justice for caste-affected communities¹⁰. The document called for legal empowerment, data collection and anti-discrimination enforcement¹¹. Furthermore, the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021, published by UNDP and Oxford University, highlighted that caste remains a key axis of deprivation. In India, over one-third of Scheduled Caste individuals were found to be multidimensionally poor, underscoring structural inequalities¹².

UN Treaty Bodies and Special Rapporteurs have consistently referenced caste-based discrimination. CERD's General Recommendation n°29 recognised descent-based discrimination as falling within the Convention's remit. More recently, the CERD committee included Dalit and caste issues in General Recommendation n°37 on racial discrimination and the right to health. Multiple Special Rapporteurs have documented caste-based violations, the most frequent including the Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, development, water and sanitation and extreme poverty. Similarly, multiple High Commissioners and Deputy High Commissioners have expressed concern about the systemic exclusion of Dalits. Moreover, many recommendations from States that participate in the Universal Periodic Review process highlight caste-based discrimination. Up until January 2022, IDSN documented how caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent were addressed by the UN treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review and the Special Procedures. You can see the full document of our UN compilation [here](#).

⁹ *Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination: Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination*, United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, OHCHR, 2017. Accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/GuidanceToolDiscrimination.pdf>.

¹⁰ IDSN News, *UN workshop sheds light on barriers to justice for Dalits in South Asia*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2024. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/un-workshop-sheds-light-on-barriers-to-justice-for-dalits-in-south-asia/>.

¹¹ *Bangkok Initiative Outcome Document, Promoting and protecting the rights of persons from descent-based communities: Access to justice, Mapping out access to justice for persons from descent-based communities in five pilot countries Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka*, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, International Dalit Solidarity Network and Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2024. Accessible at: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/issues-focus/access-justice/Bangkok-Initiative-OUTCOME-Documents.docx&ved=2ahUKEwif08Hi5c2MAxWHUUEAHdB1AZAQFnoECBoQAQ&usg=AOvVaw33MRmVJoK6YmJl3EitBkZR>.

¹² *Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender*, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNDP, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2021. Accessible at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2021-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi>.

UN agencies have undertaken activities that explicitly address caste-based discrimination. In Nepal, the UN Country Team (UNCT) conducted a 2018 perception survey which revealed widespread recognition of caste-based discrimination and exclusion among Dalit communities, with over half of Dalit respondents stating that they had faced discrimination in the past year¹³. Moreover, curriculum reform supported by UNESCO and UNICEF in Nepal from 2007–2012 integrated peace, human rights and civic education with the aim of dismantling discriminatory norms, including those based on caste¹⁴.

In India, UNICEF and UNESCO reported in 2014 that Dalit girls had the highest exclusion rate from primary education, attributed in part to caste-based discrimination and abuse from teachers¹⁵.

In 2011, the draft [UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent](#) was published by the Human Rights Council. This is a comprehensive legal framework developed to eliminate [discrimination based on work and descent](#) derived from existing international human rights principles and obligations. Unfortunately, the document is still a draft, despite IDSN's urging.

3. Do you have information on UN activities benefiting persons belonging to minorities regardless of their minority status (i.e. because they belong to a group discriminated on other grounds, or because they live in an area hit by natural disasters, etc.)? If yes, please specify.

This section outlines how Dalits have benefitted from UN activities not specifically targeted at them, but which supported vulnerable populations generally. However, the lack of attention to Dalit-specific issues has often limited the effectiveness of these activities.

In India, UNICEF's education initiatives have included Dalit children, though caste-based barriers remain a major obstacle to accessing them. UN Women's economic programmes have created opportunities for Dalit women, although intersecting caste and gender discrimination again continues to limit access. UNDP's livelihoods programmes in rural India have indirectly supported Dalits, albeit with limited impact due to systemic exclusion.

In Sri Lanka, UNDP's governance reforms have potential to support Dalit inclusion, though such impacts are not systematically tracked. UNICEF's child protection efforts may aid Dalit children, but comprehensive inclusion strategies are lacking. The ILO's vocational training programmes have included marginalised castes; however, Dalit participation remains low due to social barriers.

In Nepal, UNDP's GESI strategy seeks to support Dalits and other marginalised communities, though implementation gaps persist. UN Women and UNICEF initiatives on economic

¹³ *Harmful Practices in Nepal: Report on Community Perceptions*, United Nations Nepal, 2020. Accessible at: https://un.org.np/sites/default/files/doc_publication/2021-02/HP_perception_survey_0.pdf

¹⁴ *Nepal: lessons from integrating peace, human rights, and civic education into social studies curricula and textbooks*, UNESCO IIEP, United Nations Children's Fund, Education Above All Foundation, Melinda Smith, 2015. Accessible at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234790>

¹⁵ IDSN News, *UNICEF: Dalit girls most excluded from primary education in India*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2014. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/unicef-dalit-girls-most-excluded-from-education-in-india/>

empowerment and maternal health, respectively, have reached some Dalit women and children.

In Bangladesh, UNDP and UNICEF programmes on social inclusion, WASH and child education have supported Dalit groups in practice, although formal recognition and representation are limited.

In Pakistan, Dalit women have indirectly benefited from UN Women initiatives, though caste is seldom addressed explicitly.

4. Have you witnessed persons belonging to minorities being discriminated in some of the actions or programmes led by the UN (or by its partners in implementing the project)? If yes, kindly describe the type of discrimination and type of accountability actions taken (or lack thereof).

IDSN has documented instances where Dalits have been discriminated against in UN-linked programmes, actions or processes. One clear example is the denial of ECOSOC consultative status to IDSN itself, which was obstructed for 15 years by the repeated deferral of its application by the NGO Committee. This constituted a blatant and intentional denial of access to the UN for Dalit voices and was condemned by international human rights bodies and the European Union¹⁶. You can read more about IDSN's fight for ECOSOC status [here](#).

Dalit human rights defenders have faced difficulties accessing UN platforms, including visa denials, harassment and restrictions under India's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which has blocked funding to organisations that speak out on caste issues following UN engagement. Arrests and surveillance of HRDs, including those speaking on caste atrocities, have further limited Dalit participation¹⁷.

In Nepal, during the 2015 earthquake and again in 2024, Dalits were often excluded from aid distribution or received aid last due to local discriminatory practices. Although these activities occurred within UN-coordinated humanitarian responses, caste-related exclusion went largely unaddressed and systemic corrective actions were minimal.

In broader development planning, UN agencies have often failed to include Dalits in programme design and implementation, reinforcing their exclusion. The absence of caste-disaggregated data has further masked disparities. Despite OHCHR's guidance, few UN country frameworks systematically integrate caste.

¹⁶ IDSN News, *The EU calls on the UN NGO Committee to end "unjust" 10 year deferral of IDSN's application*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2021. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/the-eu-calls-on-the-un-ngo-committee-to-end-unjust-10-year-deferral-of-idsns-application/>

¹⁷ IDSN News, *Amnesty and HRW ask India to stop arresting Dalit rights activists on politically motivated grounds*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2018. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/amnesty-and-hrw-ask-india-to-stop-arresting-dalit-rights-activists-on-politically-motivated-grounds/>

5. Please provide examples of minority issues which should have been included in the UN political and programmatic work and were not?

IDSN identifies several priority issues insufficiently addressed in UN political and programmatic work. First, manual scavenging and sanitation work, which includes the removal of human excreta from dry latrines, railroad tracks and sewers by hand are undertaken only by those from the Dalit community and remains largely absent from UN sanitation and labour initiatives, despite its status as caste-based slavery. Second, Dalits often face discriminatory exclusion from water and sanitation facilities, yet UN WASH programmes seldom address this segregation. Finally, Dalits are among the most vulnerable to climate impacts and disasters but are rarely included in disaster risk reduction planning, despite their disproportionate exposure to risk¹⁸.

6. Further information IDSN wishes to convey

Reprisals against Dalit HRDs engaging with the UN remain a pressing concern. The cancellation of an organisation's FCRA registration following its collaboration with UN mechanisms illustrates a broader pattern of state retaliation. The FCRA has been widely criticised by UN experts for suppressing civil society, particularly those working with marginalised groups¹⁹. Individual HRDs have also been harassed or detained on politically motivated grounds after international advocacy, further demonstrating the risks faced by Dalit defenders from India.

IDSN urges the Special Rapporteur to continue highlighting caste-based discrimination as a minority rights issue and to call for stronger inclusion of Dalits in all areas of UN work, as well as robust protections for Dalit HRDs engaging with UN mechanisms.

¹⁸ *Strategy 2024–2030*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2024. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/IDSN-2024-2030-Strategy.pdf>.

¹⁹ IDSN News, *UN Special Rapporteur criticises India's FCRA*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/un-special-rapporteur-criticises-indias-fcra/>.