International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Recommendations for the 60th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council (8 September – 8 October 2025)

In connection with their participation in the 60th Human Rights Council (HRC) session, Member States (MS) 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 several regions of the world, including the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe and is frequently addressed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Procedures mandate holders. Nonetheless, more needs to be done to ensure that caste-based discrimination is recognised by the Council and mainstreamed into UN resolutions.

In the context of the reports presented at the 60th 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 HRC resolutions.

Overview of recommendations from IDSN:

Engage with the Special Rapporteur on the right to development to highlight Dalit women's compounded discrimination and **advocate for caste- and gender-sensitive policies that enhance participation and protect women human rights defenders.**

Engage with the Special Rapporteur on Slavery to **call for stronger legal enforcement** and inclusive, **community-based strategies to end hazardous and exploitative labour** affecting Dalit children.

Engage with the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation to **address caste-based barriers to safe drinking water and sustainable energy**, ensuring Dalit communities' meaningful participation and equitable access.

Engage with the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights to secure effective implementation of bans on hazardous work, **guarantee Dalit access to justice, and recognise caste-based discrimination as a barrier to remedies.**

Engage with the thematic reports of the **OHCHR** to **call for caste-sensitive, rights-based policies to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity among Dalit women** and of the **Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the DDPA** to **support the implementation** of the Durban Declaration **in addressing caste-based discrimination.**

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to development (10 September, 15:00-18:00)

During the council, the Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Mr Surya Deva, will present his report which focuses on the "Nexus between gender equality and the right to development" (A/HRC/60/25). With this research, he highlights the mutually reinforcing ways in which gender equality for girls and women lead to the realisation of their right to development, and conversely how realising their right to development results in gender equality.

The recognition of Dalit women in the report is crucial, as they face a systemic "triple burden" of caste, gender and economic oppression. These intersecting forms of discrimination expose Dalit women to slavery-like practices, exploitative labour conditions and barriers to education, health and political participation, thereby systematically undermining their right to development and perpetuating cycles of marginalisation. This marginalisation not only undermines the right to development but perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality. The interactive dialogue offers an opportunity for Member States to spotlight the urgency of dismantling caste, with law and policy reforms that can achieve substantive gender equality and address entrenched patriarchal norms, ensuring inclusive and equitable development. [1]

In his report, the Rapporteur highlights marginalised groups, mentioning Dalits specifically, stating the following:

73. Girls and women face numerous barriers to participation in decision-making. Women of African descent and Roma, Haratin, burakumin, Dalit, migrant, displaced, Indigenous, ethnic and rural women face additional barriers to participation. Women are also affected significantly by development displacement and often receive no compensation due to their non-ownership of land. (…) An additional barrier to the participation of women is the growing use of strategic litigation against public participation to silence and intimidate women human rights defenders.

82. Women and girls are not a homogeneous group. Due to intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, they may face barriers to gender equality because of race, colour, caste, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, minority, Indigenous, migrant or refugee status or residence in a rural location. Dalit women, for example, face the triple burden of gender, caste and economic oppression. Unless such multilayered discrimination is recognised and intersectional data are collected, States and businesses will not be able to respond to the intersectional discrimination faced by girls and women.

IDSN recommends that States:

- Highlight the compounded discrimination faced by Dalit women in the dialogue and call for a caste- and gender-sensitive approach to the right to development.

[1] For more on the nexus between gender equality and the right to development in South Asia, please see IDSN's submission to the Special Rapporteur: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/IDSN-Input-for-the-2025-reports-of-the-UN-Special-Rapporteur-on-the-right-to-development.pdf

- Support the collection and use of disaggregated data by caste and gender to address structural inequalities and guide effective policy responses, as recommended by the SR.
- Advocate for concrete measures to dismantle barriers to Dalit women's participation in decision-making, including land ownership, education, dignified work and political representation.
- Ensure protection of Dalit women human rights defenders, who play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and the right to development.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Slavery (12 September, 10:00-13:00)

Mr Tomoya Obokata, the Special Rapporteur on Slavery, will present his report titled "Worst forms of child labour: assessing progress and persisting challenges" (A/HRC/60/28). In this report, he highlights persisting challenges in eradicating hazardous and exploitative work despite global commitments under SDG target 8.7. In order to end the worst forms of child labour, the SR recommends "stronger legal enforcement, international cooperation, and inclusive, community-based strategies that involve children in shaping policies and solutions".

Caste-affected communities, particularly Dalit children, are disproportionately subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including bonded labour (brick kilns), hazardous agricultural work (in hybrid cottonseed farms in India), textiles and garments under the "Sumangali scheme, domestic servitude (leading to abuse and sexual violence), illegal mining and quarrying. The persistence of such practices reflects deeply entrenched caste-based hierarchies and cultural acceptance of exploitation. Dalit children are often excluded from education, social protection and legal remedies, perpetuating cycles of poverty and systemic discrimination.[2]

Although his report does not specifically refer to the intersectionality in some countries of caste and child labour, the SR makes an important point with regard to the need to address the 'normalisation' of child labour in some contexts due to perceived traditions and mindsets.

35. In some contexts, traditional practices may actively contribute to perpetuation of the worst forms of child labour. For instance, begging for offerings in streets or working in agriculture or private homes may be mandated by religious and educational establishments. A culture of tolerance or acceptance at the local and national levels, particularly for children belonging to marginalized groups, has been observed in various parts of the world. This highlights the need to raise awareness among the general public in order to change mindsets. In this process, the active participation of local and religious leaders, educational institutions, public service providers, civil society, businesses and workers' organizations, as well as children and their families, is essential.

IDSN recommends that States:

[2] For more on the worst forms of child labour affecting Dalit Children in South Asia, please see IDSN's submission to the SR here: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/IDSN-input-to-the-Special-Rapporteur-on-contemporary-forms-of-slavery-2025.pdf

- Call attention to the disproportionate prevalence of the worst forms of child labour among Dalit and other marginalised children, and urge stronger legal enforcement against caste-based bonded and forced labour.
- Call for child labour laws to be strictly enforced by closing loopholes like family-based exemptions, ratifying ILO Conventions 182 and 138, criminalising caste-based discrimination and strengthening laws against bonded labour.
- Support inclusive, community-based strategies that dismantle cultural tolerance of child labour, including active involvement of Dalit-led organisations, local leaders, and children themselves.
- Promote access to quality education, social protection and rehabilitation for Dalit children withdrawn from exploitative labour, ensuring accountability and sustainable reintegration.
- Support promising initiatives such as seasonal hostels to support children of sugarcane workers, education scholarships for Dalit children and legal reforms which aim to improve school access. Other initiatives such as businesses integrating caste-sensitive due diligence, especially in garment, agriculture and brick kiln industries are also of interest.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on hazardous wastes (15 September, 15:00-18:00)

The Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Dr. Marcos A. Orellana, will present his guidelines on access to justice and effective remedies in the context of toxics (A/HRC/60/34). The report highlights systemic barriers faced by victims of toxic exposure in seeking redress, while proposing innovative strategies and good practices to overcome them.

95. (…) class actions are also enabling victims to confront toxic pollution. Dalit organizations in Nepal have similarly mobilized to challenge environmental racism in industrial zones.

For caste-affected communities, the link between toxic exposure and discrimination is acute: Dalits remain disproportionately employed in hazardous and degrading forms of labour, including manual scavenging and waste work, where they are exposed to sewage, chemicals and other toxics with little or no protection. Furthermore, this exposure is highly gendered, as it is estimated that around 1.3 million Dalits in India, mostly women, make their living through manual scavenging[3]. Despite laws prohibiting manual scavenging in India, weak enforcement and entrenched caste hierarchies perpetuate the practice, leaving Dalit workers at risk of disease, injury and premature death. At the same time, Dalit communities often face discrimination in courts, administrative bodies and local governance structures, leaving them without effective remedies[4].

IDSN recommends that States:

[3] For more on manual scavenging, see IDSN's key issues webpage.
[4] On Dalits and equal access to justice, see IDSN's publication regarding the 2018 Regional Conference on Equal Access to Justice for All : Using Law to Dismantle Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia.

- Acknowledge the disproportionate exposure of Dalit communities to hazardous and degrading work, including manual scavenging, and urge effective implementation of bans on the practice.
- Support measures to guarantee that Dalit workers and communities have equal access to justice and effective remedies in cases of toxic exposure, including through collective and class actions.
- Promote the adoption of the Special Rapporteur's guidelines with explicit recognition of caste-based discrimination as a barrier to remedy and accountability.

Presentation of SG/HC thematic reports, briefing by PBC Chair, ECOSOC President and other reports of WG followed by General Debate item 3 (18 September, 11:30-13:00)

Relevant report : Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Update to the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity (A/HRC/60/43)

IDSN wishes to highlight the disproportionate rate of maternal mortality that affects Dalit women. Caste-based discrimination drives disproportionately high maternal mortality and morbidity among Dalit women. Social exclusion, poverty and limited access to quality healthcare intersect to exacerbate these risks. Addressing caste as a key determinant of health is essential for achieving equitable maternal health outcomes.

The OHCHR report highlights that maternal mortality reflects systemic failures to uphold women's rights, disproportionately affecting marginalised women, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

6. Current rates of maternal mortality should not be seen as inevitable, but rather as reflective of a failure by States to ensure the full realization of women's human rights, in particular the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the most marginalized populations.

14. A deeper analysis of those most affected by maternal mortality is essential to better understand and address the phenomenon. Marginalized women, women living in poverty, women living in rural areas and women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including on grounds of racial or ethnic origin, face higher rates of mortality…

20. Structural inequalities in healthcare systems in some countries drive disparities in maternal health by restricting access to quality services, reinforcing social inequities and allowing systemic bias to persist, particularly affecting marginalized communities and individuals

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IDSN recommends that States:

- Recognise Dalit women as a marginalised group disproportionately affected by maternal mortality and implement targeted measures to address their specific needs. Furthermore, ensure that healthcare policies and programmes are inclusive, equitable, and sensitive to caste-based disparities in access to maternal health services.

Presentation of Item 9 reports (Intergovernmental Working Group, Ad Hoc Committee, Group of Independent Experts) followed by General Debate item 9 (1 October, 16:45-18:00)

Relevant report : Report of the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action on its eleventh session (A/HRC/60/79)

The Durban Declaration has been a cornerstone in addressing racial discrimination globally, yet caste-based discrimination -particularly against Dalits- remains largely overlooked. Caste intersects with race, ethnicity and other forms of marginalisation, compounding exclusion and inequality. Fully integrating caste within the Durban framework is essential to ensure anti-discrimination efforts reach all marginalised communities. The report provided by the Group of Independent Eminent Experts is an opportunity for Member States to engage on the issue and actively tackle caste.

In the report, the group highlights how racial discrimination against Asians must also consider its intersections with caste, colonial histories and economic disparities :

9. …Addressing racial discrimination against Asians must also include confronting its intersections with caste, colonial histories and economic disparities. Individuals from historically marginalized castes, particularly Dalits, experienced compounded discrimination – facing both caste-based oppression and racialized exclusion, often treated as "inferior" within broader society. …

IDSN recommends that States:

- Take the floor during the presentation of reports, showing support for the Group of Independent Eminent Experts' work and especially regarding their focus on marginalised communities such as Dalits. This data is crucial for highlighting discriminations and human rights violations that caste affected communities face.
- Support the full implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, ensuring it addresses all forms of discrimination, including caste-based exclusion and acknowledge the compounded discrimination faced by Dalits within broader discussions on racial discrimination.

Please note that some HRC60 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.