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Answer given by High Representative/Vice President Ashton
on behalf of the Commission
(8.8.2013)

The EU is active in the UN context and has contributed to the work of the former UN Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, including the final report on Discrimination based on Work and Descent. The EU has also contributed to the debate on caste-based discrimination in the UN Universal Periodic Review process regarding India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The European Union pays great attention to non-discrimination, gender issues and women's rights, freedom of religion and belief, topics that are regularly raised with the countries of the region. In the case of India, these topics are also discussed in the context of the local EU-India Human Rights Dialogue.

In India and Nepal, caste discrimination and its effects have also been targeted by EU financial support, both through geographic instruments (Country or Regional Strategies) and thematic instruments (in particular the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)). The EIDHR strategy documents for 2011-2013 contain an explicit reference to caste-based discrimination. In Sri Lanka, assistance through these instruments has been supporting initiatives to uplift the social and political human rights and living conditions of Indian-origin plantation Tamils.

In India, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities are the main target of the EU Sector Policy Support "Programme for Universalization of Elementary Education" (SSA, for children in the age group six to 14) and the "Programme for Universalization of Secondary Education" (RMSA, for children aged 15 to 18 years). The EU contribution to SSA for the period 2007-2011 was EUR 66.7 million and for SSA and RMSA jointly for the period 2012-2017 is EUR 80 million.