

Joint Declaration and Global Call for Action to Eliminate Caste-Based Discrimination

We, over hundred Dalit activists and social movement leaders from the caste affected countries of Bangladesh, India, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Senegal and Yemen, solidarity networks from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, members of International Organizations, International Non-Governmental Organizations, and researchers, united for the International Consultation on Good Practices and Strategies to Eliminate Caste Based Discrimination, and launched this Declaration and Global Call for Action.

Building upon the Kathmandu Dalit Declaration (2004), the Ambedkar Principles (2005), The Hague Declaration on the Human Rights and Dignity of Dalit Women (2006), and the Geneva Declaration for the Decisive Decade against Discrimination Based on Work and Descent (2011);

Recognising that caste-based discrimination¹ is a violation of international human rights law that affects more than 260 million people worldwide, particularly in South Asia, including Dalits and other communities discriminated against on the basis of work and descent;

Condemning the heinous structures of caste and the continued practice of caste-based discrimination in the public and private spheres, the impunity for crimes committed, and the egregious impact on affected persons, including violence, rape, poverty, landlessness, caste-based slavery and other forms of economic, social, cultural and political exclusion;

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family and holds that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms therein without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status;

Confirming the obligations of States to eliminate caste-based discrimination and emphasising the responsibilities of international and national human rights bodies, the private sector, multilateral and bilateral development agencies and financial institutions, and non-governmental organisations to assist in the elimination of caste-based discrimination through local, national, regional and international measures;

Deeply concerned that women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination face intersecting forms of discrimination and particular human rights violations such as rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and domestic violence, and less access to political and economic participation;

Affirming the [draft] UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, including the general and specific measures proposed in the areas of survey and research; segregation; protection against violence; access to justice; equal employment opportunities; forced labour; equal access to health, food, water, housing and education; awareness raising; discrimination against women; participation; humanitarian and development assistance; market enterprises; international cooperation; and diaspora communities;

Recalling General Recommendation XXIX on descent-based discrimination adopted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination;

Recalling International Labour Organization Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, and its accompanying Recommendation No. 111;

Recalling also General Comment No. 20 on Non-Discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comments No. 25 and 28 adopted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and General Recommendation No. 7 adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child;

Recalling the global commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and the urgent need to adopt enhanced measures to ensure that all persons can benefit from the MDGs without discrimination on the basis of caste;

¹ The term "caste-based discrimination" as used in the Declaration is meant to include discrimination based on caste, based on work and descent and based on analogous forms of inherited status.

Deploring the failures to implement fully legislation and policies to combat caste-based discrimination and the resultant continued exclusion and marginalisation, including political exclusion, and lack of equal access to public services, land, education, markets, credit and proper employment;

Deeply concerned that in situations of humanitarian crisis and in disaster response, caste-based discrimination continues to exclude affected communities from equal access to assistance and relief measures;

Calling for a world conference on the elimination of caste-based discrimination and a UN Convention on Caste-based Discrimination;

Calling for coherence in policies to eliminate caste-based discrimination and adherence to human rights obligations, including the prohibition of caste-based discrimination, and to this end, we issue this Global Call for Action to Eliminate Caste-Based Discrimination.

Urgent Global Call for Action to Eliminate Caste Discrimination

We make this urgent Global Call for Action to citizens of the world to bring an end to millennia of immense human suffering, resulting from a brutal system of caste segregation, affecting over 260 million people worldwide.

We support the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: “Other seemingly insurmountable walls, such as slavery and apartheid, have been dismantled in the past. We can and must tear down the barriers of caste too.”

We call for leadership, cooperation and constructive engagement at the local, national, regional and international levels to achieve a caste-free world.

We call for the empowerment of individuals and communities facing caste-based discrimination in decision-making at all levels of governance and in the implementation of policies that affect them.

We declare that structures of caste or analogous systems of inherited status constitute an offence to human dignity, a barrier to equality and a form of apartheid that has been perpetuated in the public and private sphere, largely with limited, or no access to justice for its victims.

We appeal for effective police reforms for investigations, independent and neutral prosecution mechanisms and an unbiased judiciary that is committed to uphold justice.

We deplore notions of ‘untouchability’, pollution and caste hierarchy that cause segregation in villages, schools and places of worship, restrict individuals to the most menial and dangerous jobs, and prevent access to justice for crimes committed against affected communities.

We Appeal to All Stakeholders to Unite to Eliminate Caste-Based Discrimination

To Governments, we applaud those states where progressive legislative and policy measures to eliminate caste-based discrimination have been adopted and we urge the full and immediate implementation of these measures and monitoring of their enforcement. We call for the development of new legislation and policies to eliminate caste-based discrimination where such measures are lacking. We appeal to governments to officially recognize caste-based discrimination and to implement without delay measures for its elimination.

We call for National Action Plans to eliminate caste-based discrimination in all affected countries, to include also specific provisions for women. We demand that all relevant UN recommendations on caste-based discrimination be put into effect immediately.

To UN Human Rights Bodies, we commend the work of the Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, and other mechanisms, with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and we call for further development of policy recommendations and technical support to eliminate caste-based discrimination.

To UN Country Teams, Multilateral and Bilateral Development Agencies, and International Financial Institutions, we welcome existing efforts to eliminate caste-based discrimination and we call for all relevant country strategies and agreements to include measures to overcome caste-based discrimination.

To the Private Sector, we urge efforts to eliminate caste-based discrimination within their own organizations, as well as within the operations of their subsidiaries and through their supply chains, and call for the application of the Ambedkar Principles and for equal access to employment opportunities.

To the Member States of the G-20, we recommend the integration of measures to eliminate caste-based discrimination into policies for protecting marginalized groups from the global financial crisis and into all their bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

To Regional Inter-Governmental Organisations, including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, European Union, African Union, Association of Southeast Asian States, and the Organization of American States, we call for attention to caste-based discrimination in their respective agendas and the adoption of appropriate dialogues, political statements and policy recommendations to member states.

To Civil Society Organisations, we call for alliances with communities discriminated against on the basis of caste in order to build strategies across relevant sectors of advocacy and service-delivery to eliminate caste discrimination. We strongly encourage drawing from the good practices of Dalits and other affected groups in the critical analysis of public institutions, media and justice mechanisms.

To the Public, we call for an immediate end to caste systems and to practices of caste-based discrimination and untouchability in private and public life. We strongly encourage expressions of solidarity with caste-affected groups and support to government reforms for the elimination of caste-based discrimination.

To Governments of Selected Countries Affected by Caste

India, we recognise the regional leadership taken in the fight against caste, such as the adoption of Constitutional provisions and guarantees, and other important legislative and policy frameworks, including affirmative action. We call for the full implementation of these measures to overcome the human rights violations that persist, including ensuring access to rights, monitoring of enforcement, and identifying and rectifying gaps in legislation and policy.

Nepal, we applaud the Interim Constitution, inclusive Constituent Assembly, establishment of the National Dalit Commission, adoption of proportional political representation for Dalits and declaring the country as an untouchability free state and we call for the full and continued implementation of these reforms, including the adoption of a National Action Plan. We further urge an inclusive State re-structuring with Constitutional guarantees of special provisions for the promotion and protection of all rights for Dalits.

Bangladesh, we welcome the recognition of caste-based discrimination and we call for the adoption and full implementation of appropriate legislative and policy measures to eliminate caste-based discrimination.

Sri Lanka, we call for the official recognition of caste-based discrimination and the adoption and implementation of the required legislative and policy measures for its elimination.

Pakistan, we call for the official recognition of caste-based discrimination and the implementation without delay of legislative and policy measures for its elimination.

Japan, we applaud the adoption of legislative and policy measures to address Buraku discrimination and now call for enactment of a law to prohibit racial discrimination, including Buraku discrimination.

United Kingdom, we call for the adoption of Clause 9 (5)(a) to allow for the amendment to outlaw caste-based discrimination as part of the UK Equality Act (2010).

African states, we call for the official recognition of caste-based and analogous forms of discrimination and the implementation without delay of measures for its elimination.

Caste-affected diaspora states, we call for investigation into practices of caste-based discrimination and recommend the adoption of legislation to prohibit caste-based discrimination.