

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Nepal: Passing of ‘Untouchability Bill’ is a historic achievement for the Dalit movement**

**Copenhagen, May 30, 2011 (IDSN)** --- The *Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Crime Elimination and Punishment Act*, which was adopted unanimously by Nepal’s interim Parliament on May 24, prohibits the practices of ‘untouchability’ both in the public and private sphere. Dalit groups have advocated for two years to ensure that the law did not only extend to the public sphere, but also to the private. It is the first time that a law, which criminalises ‘untouchability’ practices in the private sphere, has ever been introduced.

Dalit activists in Nepal have celebrated the passing of the bill with rallies in the capital of Kathmandu. Ms. Durga Sob, President of the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO), calls the passing of the Bill, “A great victory for the Dalit movement which simultaneously brings about a great challenge for dissemination and implementation.”

Coordinator of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, Ms Rikke Nöhrind, calls the adoption of the Bill a “historic achievement for the Dalit movement, and a key cornerstone for the elimination of caste-based discrimination in Nepal,” and says that, “IDSN welcomes the adoption of the bill, which is the most comprehensive law on caste-based discrimination ever passed - It serves as an example for other countries.”

While the passing of the law is a great achievement, it is only the first step to ensuring effective protection of Dalits rights. In line with Ms. Sob and other Dalit activists, IDSN recommends that the Government of Nepal develop an overall framework for action, such as a National Action Plan, to eliminate caste discrimination. This would provide an institutional tool to ensure implementation of such provisions and national commitments and set an example for other countries with caste systems.

“The adoption of the Bill on Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability must be accompanied by political will and strong institutional mechanisms to implement its provisions and keep perpetrators accountable,” explains IDSN Coordinator Ms. Nöhrind.

In a statement welcoming the new bill, Jyoti Sanghera, Head of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Nepal, similarly comments that, “It is now vital to ensure effective implementation of this law, taking appropriate measures such as raising awareness of the law amongst the general public and specific training for the police.”

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The law also ensures proportional participation of Dalits in all state structures; increased punishments for public officials found responsible of discrimination; requirements for perpetrators to provide compensation to victims; and criminalises incitement for caste-based discrimination. The final bill is not yet publicly available in English.

### **More information:**

Contact Durga Sob, President of the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) on [durgasob@hotmail.com](mailto:durgasob@hotmail.com), or +9779851083231 or IDSN Coordinator, Rikke Nöhlind, on [rn@idsn.org](mailto:rn@idsn.org) or +4560433430 for comments and interviews

Read more about caste discrimination in Nepal: <http://idsn.org/country-information/nepal/>

Read more about what IDSN's work: [www.idsn.org](http://www.idsn.org)

### **Background on caste discrimination in Nepal:**

Eliminating caste-based discrimination is one of the key challenges to ensure access to justice in Nepal. Dalits in Nepal, formerly known as 'untouchables', are routinely denied access to religious sites; they face extreme resistance to inter-caste marriages; and non-Dalits refuse to handle water touched by them, to mention some examples. Dalit women are even worse off than Dalit men. They have no control over land, housing or money; they are forced into demeaning jobs; and they are strongly under-represented all levels of decision-making. According to the official 2001 census, the Dalits constitute 13 per cent of Nepal's population, but researchers and Dalit organisations assess that this number could be above 20 per cent.

### **Other references:**

[Read the National Dalit Commission and OHCHR-Nepal Press Statement on the passing of the bill](#)

[Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent](#)

[Information on the Universal Periodic Review of Nepal in January 2011](#)