

PRESS RELEASE

----- For immediate release -----

Broad backing for new UN guidelines to eliminate caste discrimination

The government of Nepal is setting an international example in addressing one of the world's most serious human rights issues. It strongly supports the UN guidelines on caste discrimination as an effective mechanism to eliminate a human rights outrage that affects 260 million people globally.

GENEVA, 17 September 2009 – A new UN framework to eliminate caste discrimination, one of the world's most serious human rights challenges, yesterday received backing from a number of international actors, including the government of Nepal, the EU presidency and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Speaking at a side event during the 12th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Nepal's State Minister for General Administration, Mr Jeet Bahadur Gautam Darjee, outlined his country's efforts to "eliminate this scourge from our society" and confirmed the Nepalese government's support for the draft UN principles and guidelines to eliminate caste discrimination.

The Minister described the guidelines as "a good reference in devising the ways and means to address the issue of caste-based discrimination" during the drafting process of Nepal's new constitution and as "useful tools" to reform and develop anti-discriminatory legislation.

At the side event, Nepal joined forces with victims of caste discrimination, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and a group of international NGOs to promote the first comprehensive UN framework to prevent and address caste discrimination.

The draft UN principles and guidelines are contained in the final report on discrimination based on work and descent (the UN terminology for caste discrimination), published by the Human Rights Council in May 2009. An estimated 260 million people globally are victims of caste discrimination, which has been likened to the former apartheid system in South Africa.

"In supporting the UN guidelines, Nepal has taken a bold and very significant step. Now other countries must follow suit, especially India, where caste discrimination affects up to 200 million people," said Rikke Nöhrind, co-ordinator of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), which works globally against caste discrimination. Dalit is the term used in South Asia for victims of this severe form of discrimination.

During a visit to New Delhi in March 2009, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called on India to show global "leadership in combating caste-based discrimination". Yesterday, Ms Pillay met with representatives of Dalit organisations and described caste discrimination as a "vital human rights concern affecting millions of people".

At the event, her office was represented by Marcia V.J. Kran, Director of the Research and Right to Development Division, who read a statement on behalf of the High Commissioner. Ms. Kran called caste discrimination "a vicious cycle of poverty and marginalisation" and stated that debt bondage, which affects many Dalits, "is considered a contemporary form of slavery." She stressed that "eliminating all forms of

discrimination remains the highest duty of the UN, its member states and all stakeholders” and also offered the assistance of her office to governments and private actors working against caste discrimination.

Referring to caste discrimination as a very important priority for the EU, the Swedish Presidency welcomed the principles and guidelines and expressed its support for the Human Rights Council's work on the issue.

The authors of the UN report on caste discrimination, professors Chinsung Chung and Yozo Yokota, presented a number of recommendations for the practical application of the guidelines, including a UN monitoring mechanism.

The meeting was sponsored by the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism and co-sponsored by Anti-Slavery International, Human Rights Watch, Minority Rights Group International, Pax Romana/ICMICA, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches in association with IDSN.

For further information on caste discrimination issues, please contact the IDSN on kw@idsn.org or +45 3524 5083

> [UN principles and guidelines for the effective elimination of discrimination based on work and descent](#)

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Background

Caste discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as work and descent, commonly originating from a division of society into castes or social categories. This chronic human rights problem, which is associated with the notion of impurity, pollution and practices of 'untouchability', involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is estimated that 260 million people are affected by caste discrimination, especially in South Asia, where they are known as Dalits, but also in Japan, Yemen and several African countries. The social exclusion and segregation suffered by Dalits is comparable to conditions during South Africa's apartheid regime.

The draft UN principles and guidelines for the effective elimination of Discrimination based on work and descent are contained in the [final report on discrimination based on work and descent](#) which was published by the Human Rights Council in May 2009. This framework is based on existing human rights principles and obligations and proposes general and special measures to be taken by multiple stakeholders, including governments, multilateral bodies and private actors.

Several UN bodies have reaffirmed that [discrimination based on work and descent](#) - the UN terminology for caste discrimination - is prohibited by international human rights law, and that it is a global human rights phenomenon which should be addressed comprehensively through existing human rights mechanisms.

International Dalit Solidarity Network

IDSN works on a global level for the elimination of caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent. IDSN is an international network consisting of national advocacy platforms in caste affected countries, Dalit solidarity networks in Europe and international associates.

Anti-Slavery International

Anti-Slavery International is the world's oldest human rights organisation and campaigns for the eradication of slavery, exposing current cases, supporting local organisations to release the minimum 12.3 million people in slavery, and the implementation of international laws against slavery. Anti-Slavery International also supports people in debt bondage and ritual slavery associated with caste discrimination across South Asia.

www.antislavery.org

Further Information:

The IDSN website – www.idsnet.org - provides a wide range of resources and material on the topic of caste discrimination, including case studies, video materials, and research materials.