

Dalit Rights are Human Rights

260 million people worldwide continue to experience discrimination based on their caste. Caste discrimination remains one of the most severe and forgotten human rights abuses of the twenty first century. It leads to extreme poverty and powerlessness which contribute to exploitation and violence against *the untouchables* - the Dalits.

In Bangladesh there are an estimated five million Dalits. In Dhaka, Dalit communities live in so called 'colonies' - deprived or excluded from adequate housing, sanitation and transport. Working in the most menial jobs, they have difficulty accessing schools and hospitals. Approximately 96% are illiterate.

*If you are not considered to be human, human rights do not apply to you.
Moni Rani, Director, Dalit Women's Forum, Bangladesh*

*"Throughout my life I have faced discrimination, violence and attacks, but now women are strengthening their positions within their families and communities.
We are coming into the light."*



Dalit women face discrimination, exclusion and violence as a result of both their caste and gender. Over 83% of Dalit girls drop out of school at secondary level - the most crucial factor in escaping poverty. Given the vast numbers of Dalit women and men living in poverty, the MDGs will not be achieved if Dalits continue to be excluded, and their human rights denied.

Through One World Action, we have trained and organised Dalits in Dhaka, so for the first time in our history we are starting to live a more dignified and hopeful life. Our children now go to school, we are voting, we have lobbied for better healthcare and housing, and our existence is finally being recognised.

Bothanki Solomon, Director, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights

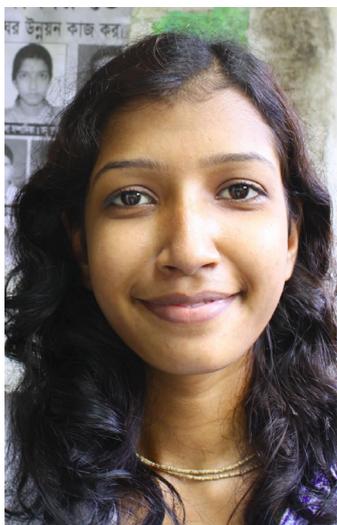
One World Action

One World Action's goal is to create the opportunity for the world's poorest and most excluded women and men to transform their own lives, and to challenge the policies that make and keep them poor and powerless. Women's empowerment is central to all we do. For over twenty years we have supported the most marginalised people to hold their local and national governments to account, enabling them to have more control over decisions that determine their ability to fight poverty. We do this by working directly with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

One World Action is supporting Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights and the Dalit Women's Forum in Dhaka to ensure that Dalits participate in, and influence the decisions that impact - their lives. The full participation of Dalit women and men in public life is the only guarantee of their rights being protected and upheld.

Recommendations

Given the renewed commitment to meeting the MDGs and in upholding international human rights obligations we are calling on all governments, donors and relevant institutions to:



"I am Sonu Rani. I am 21 and the first Dalit woman to be elected to my Local Council. In my community women do not go to the local hall, so during the election campaign I invited them to my house. When they came I explained the importance of our voice and participation in changing things. We need to address issues such as water, housing and education but most importantly we need to say what we think and be part of the solution."



"I went to my commissioner to ask for a scholarship as I did well in my exams. He said I won't sign this. You are a Dalit girl. You are not fit for higher education. I begged him but he ripped up my form. So my mother took a loan to educate me - I will not give up. I want to be the first Dalit policewoman in Bangladesh."

Ensure that tackling caste discrimination is an integral part of all relevant multilateral and bilateral aid programmes, developing clear benchmarks, disaggregated data and indicators to monitor this.

Scale up and earmark funding to explicitly address caste discrimination and exclusion.

Take action to push for the adoption of the UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent at the UN Human Rights Council.

Recognise caste discrimination as a priority human rights and development issue.

Work with the European Union towards a cross-European policy framework for the effective elimination of caste discrimination.

Ensure transparent and participatory engagement of Dalit women and men in the design, delivery and evaluation of all programmes in caste-affected countries and develop partnerships with Dalit led organisations.

Take on the Ambedkar Principles and work to ensure that non-discriminatory employment principles are adopted by all NGOs and foreign investors engaging with caste-affected countries.



"When I was at school the teacher told us, 'You Dalits will never be more than cleaners. Dalit people are only good for sweeping, not studying.' Before we opened this school our children thought they would also be sweepers. But now they want to be doctors or lawyers."



"The police ignore Dalits. People say we are unclean and shun us. We hide our identity, names and language at the hospital, so we can get decent treatment. Our community is under constant threat of eviction."

BDHR

Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights

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FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD