

Navi Pillay highlights power asymmetries leading to Caste based Gender Discrimination and Violence faced by Dalit women



Side event on Dalit women in the 23 Human Rights Council, United Nations, Geneva

Geneva, June 7, 2013 The UN High Commissioner, Navi Pillay, made a very strong argument in favour of Dalit women by locating the intersections of caste and gender, not from the angle of violence alone, but by rightly pointing out structural causes of inequity and oppression.

In her statement presented at the *Side-event by Dalit women, at the 23rd session of the UN Human Rights Council* the UN High Commissioner points out, 'Due to pervasive sexism combined with their caste status, women from discriminated caste groups have limited access to land, inheritance and other economic resource and their usually higher illiteracy rates further exacerbates their economic vulnerabilities.'

The well crafted statement, calls upon member states and all stakeholders to challenge impunity and end untouchability and discrimination faced by Dalit women across the South Asian region.

Drawing inspiration from Dalit struggles for justice, Navi Pillay extends her full solidarity and support to the Dalit women from caste affected countries, who organized the side event at Human Rights Council in Geneva. Further she states, 'I reiterate my fullest commitment in

contributing to the eradication of caste discrimination and untouchability and the correlated deeply rooted exclusion, exploitation and marginalisation of Dalit women and other affected groups through the work of my office.

Dalit women from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan made powerful interventions at the United Nations by contextualizing the quest for gender justice in a caste stratified society. They conducted interactive meetings with several member states, contributed to the resolutions in Violence and Discrimination against women, extended solidarity to other human rights issues and interacted at length with several special procedures and the OHCHR in particular.

Parallel to High commissioner statement, the German Ambassador raised a question in the annual day discussion on women rights in HRC 23 about the multiple and intersecting discrimination of Dalit women in South Asia and United Nations' approach to gender and caste-based discrimination.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, recollected her country visits and testimonials from Dalit women survivors of violence. She reiterated the urgent need for state accountability to address the underlying causes of inequity and oppression to bring justice to the women subjugated on account of caste system.

This historical process led by Dalit women is hoped to bring more strength and power to the ongoing work within country to bring justice to victims of violence. Further, Dalit women leaders have made a strong appeal to Governments of caste-affected countries to devise effective monitoring mechanisms for protection of Dalit women including access to budgets and civil and political rights.

Deriving strength from Dr. B.R Ambedkar and his significant contribution to women's rights, Dalit women are forging ahead building leadership, seeking accountability and consolidating energies at all levels to dismantle caste and bring meaningful justice to Dalit women.

**

Statement issued by All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch – NCDHR

*For further details: Asha Kowtal – asha.kowtal@nchdr.org.in
Manjula Pradeep – manjula.hp@gmail.com*