

A message by  
UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women,  
its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo  
***Side-Event: Dalit women: Working together towards the elimination of multiple and  
intersecting forms of discrimination and violence based on gender and caste***  
Geneva, 4 June 2013 – Palais des Nations

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the organizers for inviting me to participate to this side-event to discuss an issue of significance in many parts of the world. I regret, however, I am unable to attend in person and hereby provide a short message to be read out on my behalf.

The reality of Dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalization in geographic contexts within which they live. Many experience some of the worst forms of discrimination, continuously, which perpetuates their subordinate position in society and increases their vulnerability, throughout generations. They are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence. They are often displaced; pushed into forced and/or bonded labour, prostitution and trafficking; and also experience inter- and intra-community violations of rights.

I have visited a number of countries in my official capacity as a UN mandate-holder mandated to monitor violence against women. Violence against women and girls is entrenched in socially and culturally accepted patriarchal norms that penetrate every social strata and every level of state administration. In the case of the Dalits, these norms are also based on their caste.

Accountability must be regarded as an indispensable tool to put an end to violence against all women and girls, including Dalits, and to offer redress for its consequences. The obligation of States to act with due diligence to eliminate violence against all women, is impacted by many factors. Some include: the lack of acceptance of violence as a human rights issue; inadequate, under-funded and limited State responses to violence; little attention to thoroughly investigate cases and patterns of violence; the prosecution and conviction of very few perpetrators; and penalties that do not reflect the nature of the crime committed. During my tenure as a Special Rapporteur, I have heard testimonies from Dalit women that could reflect many of the same challenges.

State responses to protect the Dalit women must include a holistic approach that takes into account the structural and underlying causes and consequences of violence, including discrimination, inequality and oppression; locates the violence that it perpetrated against them in a continuum both spatially and temporally; has a human rights-based approach with due regard to the interdependence of all human rights; acknowledges the structural aspects and factors of discrimination, which includes institutional inequalities; and it must analyse social and/or economic hierarchies between women and men and also among women.

Thank you for your attention.