

Appeal to UN Special Procedures mandate holders (2014)

In recent years, UN Special Procedures mandate holders have increasingly addressed **caste-based discrimination** – known as discrimination based on work and descent in UN terminology - in reports and communications. In May 2013, for instance, seven Special Procedures mandate holders issued a joint [media statement](#) on caste-based discrimination, which affects an estimated 260 million people worldwide. They noted that “caste-based discrimination remains widespread and deeply rooted, its victims face structural discrimination, marginalization and systematic exclusion, and the level of impunity is very high.” The experts urged world governments to strengthen protection of the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from this type of discrimination, and to endorse the draft [UN Principles and Guidelines](#) for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

All in all, 17 mandate holders have made references to this form of discrimination. The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) thanks and commends all mandate holders for their attention to this issue, which itself signals the growing recognition of caste-based discrimination as a major international human rights challenge, and illustrates the alarming prevalence of this problem in a number of affected countries.

Most recently, at a side event on caste-based violence against women during the Annual Full-Day of Discussion on Women’s Rights at the 26th session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur for Minority Issues, Ms. Rita Izsák, spoke of the grave human rights situation facing victims of caste-based violence and discrimination. The side event allowed for a constructive dialogue as well as a sharing of information and recommendations between UN agencies, civil society organizations and states. At the event several special calls were made to Special Procedures mandate-holders regarding their engagement in future processes in the fight against caste-based discrimination. Ms. Rita Izsák specifically highlighted the need for Special Rapporteurs to work together to address the cross-cutting issue of caste-based violence and discrimination and recommended that a meeting of Special Procedures mandate holders be held in order to move forward in tackling this challenging issue.

The former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, demonstrated a strong commitment to the elimination of caste-based discrimination and made a number of bold and significant [statements](#) on the issue. Ms. Pillay also delivered the opening statement at the aforementioned side-event noting the magnitude and gravity of caste-based violence and the need for concerted action. In so doing, she recounted the multitude of recommendations from Special Rapporteurs, Treaty Bodies, and the Universal Periodic Review Working Group and urged implementation of these recommendations by governments of caste-affected countries.

On the occasion of the 21st annual meeting of UN Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Independent Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Human Rights Council (29 September to 3 October 2014), IDSN respectfully requests all relevant mandate holders to:

- Urge states to endorse the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent;

- Issue a joint statement on the topic identifying caste-based discrimination as a cross-cutting issue of concern and outlining areas of joint intervention;
- Visit caste-affected countries and include the issue of caste-based discrimination in monitoring and investigations;
- Refer to the draft UN Principles and Guidelines and to situations of caste-based discrimination whenever relevant, and urge state as well as non-state actors to address this issue;
- Ensure that caste-based discrimination and affected communities are specifically mentioned, along with other forms of discrimination and discriminated groups, when gathering information, e.g. in the context of questionnaires to governments and civil society actors;
- Consider under relevant agenda item of mandate holders' annual meeting in 2015 to have a discussion on the topic and a joint session with treaty bodies on follow up on observations, concluding observations and recommendations related to caste-based discrimination in the work of special procedures, treaty bodies and the UPR process, and include suggestions on:
 - creating a regular joint review process on status and follow such observations, conclusions and recommendations on caste discrimination; and
 - developing a road map for action to improve implementation of such recommendations
 - engage in OHCHR/UN consultations on caste-based discrimination

For your information, IDSN has prepared a compilation of references to caste-based discrimination by UN Special Procedures mandate holders in the past nine years. Please find below links to this compilation as well as other relevant documents:

- [IDSN compilation of references to caste-based discrimination by UN Special Procedures 2005-2014](#) (August 2014)
- [IDSN compilation of UN reference to caste discrimination](#) (Ninth edition) August 2014
- [The draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent](#)
- [Statement by UN Special Procedures mandate holders on caste-based discrimination and 'untouchability' May 2013](#)
- [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights statements on caste-based discrimination](#)
- [Report from the HRC26 side event "Caste based violence against women: the role of the UN in combatting caste-based violence and discrimination" June 2014](#)

We thank you for your contributions to placing caste-based discrimination on the international human rights agenda and look forward to further co-operation.

IDSN, Copenhagen, 12 September 2014

IDSN Members and Associates: The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) – India; The Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) – Nepal; Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM); Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network; The Dalit Solidarity Network – UK; The Dalit Solidarity Platform – Germany; The Dalit Network – Netherlands; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Denmark; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Belgium; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Norway; The Dalit Solidarity Network – Finland; National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR) – India; Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) – Nepal; National Federation of Dalit Women – India; Navsarjan Trust – India; Peoples Watch – India; Human Rights Watch; The Lutheran World Federation; The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism; Anti-Slavery International; The Minority Rights Group International; The Asian Human Rights Commission; The Robert F. Kennedy Foundation; Pax Romana ICMICA/MIIC; FORUM-ASIA; The World Council of Churches; The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative; Asian Centre for Human Rights; Franciscans International; International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka