



**Respect their rights**  
End the impunity of violence  
against Dalit women

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**RESPECT THEIR RIGHTS**

END THE IMPUNITY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST DALIT WOMEN

## IMPUNITY: A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

One day Chandra, a 35 year-old Dalit women from Tamil Nadu, went to fetch water from the public water tap in the village. A woman belonging to the dominant caste was busy filling her numerous vessels. When Chandra asked politely if she could take just one bucket of water, as she had little time to wait, the woman reacted in fury. Who was Chandra to make demands of her? Who did she think she was? Within no time, family members of the woman of the dominant caste were on the spot, and started to curse and beat Chandra. Other Dalits from the village ran to the rescue and took the badly wounded Chandra to hospital. When she was released from hospital, Chandra filed a complaint with the police. At first she was backed by a local NGO, but after several of the activists were threatened by the dominant caste, it felt it had to withdraw. The dominant caste also tried to manipulate the Dalit community against supporting Chandra. In spite of the pressure which caused fear and stress in the whole Dalit community, Chandra has gained status in the eyes of her Dalit group; she is the first Dalit in the whole region to dare file a case against the dominant caste.

In many parts of India, such as the southern region where Chandra lives, Dalits face discrimination on a daily basis. Impunity of violence against Dalit women is taken as a given. Chandra's community felt proud of having achieved as much as a protest against the dominant caste. For the accused to have been brought to court and Chandra paid a compensation was beyond the horizon of their expectations, but the

## REPORTING OF VIOLENCE

From the 500 cases in *Dalit women speak out*<sup>1</sup>,

In 40.4% of the cases the women did not even attempt to obtain legal or community justice;

In 26.6% of cases the women sought legal or community justice, but were prevented from obtaining it by the perpetrators and their supporters, and by the community at large;

In 1.6% of the cases Dalit women were able to obtain informal justice;

In 17.5% of all instances of violence reached the notice of police but the attempts for justice were thwarted by the police themselves.

Only in 13.9% (75 out of 500) cases was appropriate police or judicial action taken. The majority of the cases are pending. Only 3.6% of the instances have ever reached the court, and of those, only three cases (less than 1%) have ended in convictions. 8 other cases have been dismissed by the courts, or ended in a forced 'compromise' or manipulation by the perpetrator.

**fact that Chandra made a complaint showed that the subordination of Dalits may not be that self-evident anymore.**

**Although real success in finding justice is rare and the crime is ever expanding, there are also signs of change. The recently published report on violence against Dalit women' with its 500 case studies , the public hearings in New Delhi and elsewhere in India where Dalit women have brought powerful testimonies of the systematic manner in which their rights are violated, as well as the increasing activism of NGOs working for the rights of Dalit women all show a growing concern and a will to act. The first international Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women indicates the global dimension of the desire to end the impunity of violence. It is a good start. Now action is needed.**

1 J. Mangubhai, A. Irudayam s.j. and J. Lee, *Dalit Women Speak Out. Violence against Dalit women in India* (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights: New Delhi 2006)



# VIOLENCE

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## UNTOUCHABILITY AND POVERTY

80 million Dalit women in India today face discrimination on a daily basis. As Dalits, as women, and as poor they are in an extremely vulnerable position. Systematic violence against Dalit women can be seen as a mechanism to keep Dalits in a subordinated position. It is built into the total structure of the dominant society, which does not acknowledge the basic human rights of Dalits in general, and Dalit women in particular. The caste-based ideology pervades all of society, and even Dalits themselves act according to its values, either unconsciously or because they are powerless to challenge them.

‘Untouchability’ is still widely practised in rural India, where the majority of Dalits live. The overall poverty ratio of Dalits is far higher than of non-Dalit groups. They live often in conditions of extreme poverty. Most Dalits have no or only marginal plots of land and have a family income that is much lower than the income of other groups. The untouchability practices and the poverty in which Dalits live are connected. Due to untouchability, Dalits may not have access to such crucial resources as the public water tap or the well in the village. In some places, Dalits are not allowed to enter the central village where higher castes live, or they may only do so barefoot. Refusing Dalits entry to the village temple is still common, as well as excluding Dalits from village rituals, for example at harvest time. Dalits are also often served from separate cups in tea stalls, an Indian institution with a great social importance. In many villages, Dalit women are also denied access to state shops providing basic foods at a low price.

In the workplace even in cities, Dalit women may be forced to eat apart from non-Dalits. The lowest groups of Dalits such as manual sanitary workers, the majority of whom are women, are often paid

their salary in goods or they may not receive any payment at all. The work, which consists of manual and unprotected cleaning of toilets or burying of dead bodies and animal carcasses, is forbidden by law but still common in practice.

These are just a few examples of the context of the violence. The specific forms vary from verbal, physical and sexual assault to domestic violence and forced prostitution, for example the still common consecration of young girls to temple prostitution.

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#### SEXUAL ABUSE OF DALIT WOMEN

Temple prostitution (the *jogini* or *devadasi* system), as one of the most extreme forms of structural violence, reveals a great deal about the position of Dalit women. Temple prostitution involves Dalit girls alone, who are ritually consecrated to the goddess Yellamma at a young age. When they have reached puberty, they are obliged to sleep with any man in the village. It is striking that higher caste men, who during the daytime treat Dalits as untouchables, are very willing to have sex with a Dalit girl or woman at night. When it comes to sex, a Dalit woman's untouchability is relative – as long as the border crossing is in the interest of the male community. What is more, it is the girl's own family who forces her to become a temple prostitute. The system is still so much part and parcel of village culture in many parts of India that it is not even seen as a violation of Dalit women's rights. That it might constitute violence has escaped the awareness of all but a few women. On the contrary, both the Dalit community and the girl's family gain in status if they can deliver Dalit girls to be consecrated as joginis. In a rare case women have succeeded in escaping from the system; for most of them temple prostitution is a lifelong plight.

Not only joginis but Dalit women in general are seen to be freely available as sexual partners to whoever fancies them. In conflicts

between caste groups, sexual abuse of Dalit women is often used as a way to teach the Dalit men a lesson by violating their 'property'. The case of the 17-year old mentally disabled Punitha is telling. She was gang-raped by men from the locally dominant caste because her mother dared to complain against the sexual harassment of Punitha by the same men. In a village in Bihar, women have been repeatedly raped by two dominant caste men in their own houses at nighttime, for no other reason than that they are Dalit women – thus available in the eyes of the men. It made apparently no difference to the men that some of the women were pregnant, perhaps on the contrary, a pregnant woman trying to protect her still unborn baby is even more vulnerable.

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#### SUBORDINATION IN THE NAME OF RITUAL PURITY

How the assumed 'untouchability' of Dalits causes situations, in which Dalit women are especially prone to violence can be clearly seen in the work context. Dalit women who work for non-Dalits or share the same workplace with non-Dalit women tend to avoid physical contact, as they know that it could lead to increased tension. This is apparent in the dominant caste household, where the caste norm stresses the importance of maintaining purity – thus distance from 'polluting' elements such as Dalits, who are not 'twice born' like the higher caste Hindus. In general, non-Dalit women - as the ones who are primarily responsible for housekeeping - practise more untouchability than non-Dalit men. Perhaps they discriminate against Dalit women for the same reason that Dalit men do: as a compensation for their own subordination, as women. From the ritual point of view, all women, even if they belong to the highest Brahmin caste, are 'polluting' as women because of the fact that they menstruate and give birth.



Although they are the main caretakers of the family and the household, many Dalit women also work outside the home to contribute to the family income. In the fields, where most Dalit women work as day labourers, they have to put up with sexual harassment and abuse from men of all castes. More often than not, protesting against the advances of the employer's family would mean losing one's job. Pretext for violence can again be found in the supposed polluting behaviour of Dalit women. Sapna Balmiki was beaten by a landowner because she let a pig cross his field. In a second incident, the landowner's son abused her when she was seven months pregnant for coming to work late.

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#### CASTE HIERARCHY AND POWER

Dalit women who question this order of affairs, either through protest actions or by asserting their rights, are frequently targets of violence from all major religious groups of society, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian alike<sup>2</sup>. Caste hierarchy thinking dominates the whole society, independent of belief and social status. Significantly, the severest forms of discrimination and violence originate from members of groups which stand slightly higher in the hierarchy. As they are being discriminated by dominant castes themselves, many feel the need to establish their superiority over Dalits at least. The hierarchy traps the Dalit community itself, in which certain Dalit groups, like manual sanitary workers, are considered to be 'lower' than others.

Suneina Devi, a Dalit woman whose family cultivated land that it had leased from a Brahmin family, was mishandled and raped by local Muslims who were jealous of the lease contract. Suneina Devi lives in Bihar, a state where there is considerable tension between different social groups. As a result, the position of Dalits is particularly weak and many live in permanent fear. In Suneina Devi's case, her original complaint to the police was fruitless, after which shame came over her,

<sup>2</sup> Among the Dalits, Dalit Christians are a considerably large group, even though most count as Hindus. Discrimination even within the Christian community is not unusual.

and out of fear that her reputation would be ruined, she did not tell anyone about the rape. Still keeping the violence to herself, she lives in constant anxiety.

The power continuum is further maintained by the economic dependency of Dalits, and of women especially, upon the higher castes. As many go virtually unsalaried, they need loans. Dalit women, if they succeed in obtaining a loan from a local landlord, are often not able to pay it back on time. Aside from the fact that Dalits, in order to get a loan at all, have to pay unreasonably high interest rates, they seldom have the means to repay any kind of debt. As a result, overt violence may be the first step to what soon becomes bonded labour, life-long slavery of unpaid labour, a situation that can even be passed from generation to generation. In the case of Dalit women, regular sexual abuse by the landlord is often part of the bondage.

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#### DEPENDENCY ON HUSBAND AND FAMILY

Within the Dalit community itself, Dalit husbands often act out their own oppressed position through violence against their wives. As most couples reside in the husband's parental home, the daughter-in-law is in a particularly weak position. Added to this are values originating from the dominant castes, which ascribe to women the position of obedient, dutiful wives whose behaviour must be controlled. Protecting women by denying them access to any noteworthy social life is seen as a way of guarding their fidelity. The chastity norm matches well with the general subordination of Dalit women.

The story of Paula, a young Dalit school teacher, is illustrative of the extent to which women are seen as dependent non-actors. Paula married an unemployed man from her own sub-caste and went to live in the house of her parents-in-law. Right after the couple had moved in, the husband started to behave aggressively towards her, and

gradually the aggression turned into physical violence. At the same time, Paula was forced to stay at home and all her social contacts were cut off; at the birth of her child, not even her own parents were allowed to visit her. She tried to escape repeatedly, but each time was persuaded to return. When she approached the local police for help, her husband's family was quick to use its connections to quash the matter. Her husband took a petition to the local court to demand that she return to live with him; Paula contacted human rights lawyers to file a counter petition. Up to this date, the cases are pending. Paula thinks that the violence happened because she was too submissive at the beginning of her marriage; the customary norm of showing women their place had too much power over her.

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#### LITTLE POLITICAL VOICE

The lack of educational opportunities contributes to the vulnerability of Dalit women. Few Dalit women ever take any kind of degree; the majority cannot even read. Consequently, they have little means to find a political voice and representation and live in a vacuum within the dominating caste hierarchy and social order. Yamma and her grown son were physically assaulted by the dominant caste when they complained about the manipulation of Dalit votes during the village council elections. When other Dalits from the village also made a complaint to the police, the dominant caste was successful in preventing further action. Without money to pay a lawyer, Yamma saw no other choice than to drop the case. She is left with frustration about the violation of Dalits' rights to cast an independent vote. Other Dalits in the village have since withdrawn from voting at all, afraid of an escalation of violence in the village.

The few Dalit women who have the ambition to occupy a political position frequently encounter resistance from the whole society. General discouragement becomes violence as soon as a Dalit woman shows too much initiative, speaks up and gains support from the larger community. Saiamma, who was elected to the regional council (*Mandal Praja Parishad*), was forced to resign by the dominant caste. Dalits from her community, who initially had supported her candidacy, turned their back on her out of fear of growing caste tension. Saiamma also had reason to fear for the safety of her family. She finally left the village and has avoided any kind of activism ever since.

# JUSTICE

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## LAWS AND THEIR APPLICATION

The Indian state is not without national and international obligations to safeguard the lives and safety of Dalit women. Unfortunately these laws, such as the International human rights law to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against Dalit women, find little following in practice. Media coverage is also minimal, and without any noteworthy publicity, the violence goes on unnoticed. The impunity of violence is a crime in itself. According to the law, all violence should be reported and pass through the hands of the local police and the judiciary. In reality, few cases are ever registered, and when they are, a further legal process can be blocked by the police and local courts, either by forcing the Dalit woman to withdraw the complaint or simply by refusing to register the case. Sometimes bribes by the perpetrators are involved. The reality is also far from Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which states that all citizens have the right to equality before the law, which means that legal processes should be impartial. When a case is brought to court, it can remain pending for years. Also here, the complete refusal of the affected woman's community to cooperate in investigations can block any final jurisprudence.

The means to make a Dalit woman drop her case are countless. Women are ridiculed by the police, or worse; instead of making a report, the police often see a Dalit woman's assertiveness as an invitation to abuse and sexual harassment. In fact, local police officers, by misusing their position, count among the most frequent offenders of Dalit women's rights.

Uma, leader of a Dalit women's self-help group, made a complaint to the police when a member of the group refused to pay back a loan.

The sub-intendent on duty was not very interested in Uma's complaint, rather used the opportunity to make sexual advances to her. Soon after, Uma's family was involved in a dispute about the ownership of a piece of land with another, more powerful family in the village. Again Uma approached the police seeking justice against the other family's unfair demands. The sub-intendent took advantage of the situation to pay Uma back for his frustrated advances and imprisoned her for more than two weeks. With the help of a lawyer, Uma filed a case against the sub-intendent, who was then removed, but Uma, who had had to pay a considerable sum of money to the lawyer, received no compensation. She has left the self-help group and is very depressed.

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#### SEEKING JUSTICE

The case of Paula and countless others show that Dalit women conform to the silence that surrounds violence and discrimination out of fear of reprisals against themselves or their family members. Some also do so out of convention, as many Dalits have internalized the values of the dominant castes. Shame and ignorance are further reasons for not seeking justice. Addressing sexual violence in particular endangers a woman's honour, a much emphasized value in the dominant discourse. Sometimes the police ask for money to register the crime. Lacking the means to protest, the women stand alone; even their own family and community may refuse to support them. Many women are aware that by withdrawing from any action, they only contribute to the ongoing wrong, but they feel unable to do otherwise.

Durga Devi was 12 years old when she was married to a man who soon became violent towards her. He abused her regularly and confiscated all of the money she earned. When not only he, but also his brother started to abuse Durga Devi, she made a complaint to the police. Her husband's family forced her to drop the case. This was not

enough for her in-laws, however. They denounced her publicly as a witch, after which she was gang-raped by the dominant caste in the village – a logical deed in the eyes of the village men, who found that the witch must be shown her place. At this point, most women would have left off pursuing any further legal measures. Durga Devi did not. Even though the men from both her husband's family and from the dominant caste tried to discredit her account by accusing her of witchcraft, Durga Devi contacted a local NGO to help her file the case with the police. The dominant caste did not hesitate to molest the NGO staff to such an extent that it had to withdraw. As often happens, it later turned out that one of the rapists had connections with higher officers. In this rare case, however, the NGO was able to negotiate an informal compensation for Durga Devi. Impressed, she joined the NGO.

What then happened to Durga Devi shows how not only the perpetrators and their allies often give false testimonies against Dalit women, but the local village council (*panchayat*) may also present the woman in an unfavourable light to the authorities. In her new role as activist, Durga Devi took up a rape of a 10 year-old Dalit girl. The police refused to register the complaint, and when Durga Devi protested against this, local politicians started to spread rumours that she belonged to the group of *naxalites* – an illegal, extremely leftist organisation that employs terrorist means – which had just set fire to the police station. Durga Devi was arrested and when she was gang-raped by several police officers, she did not even try to seek justice.

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#### EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

As we have seen in Uma's case and in others, the violence causes long-term physical, social and mental suffering. It is not just a few women who suffer permanent physical injuries and remain disabled for the rest

of their lives. Sexual violence often results in miscarriage or pregnancy. Women have lost their property; in some cases their houses have been demolished; or they have had to face social ostracization. Ongoing violence or the fear of it may restrict Dalit women's freedom of movement. Some women have been forced to leave their home and family. Many women feel depressed and ashamed. Some seek the ultimate escape and attempt suicide.

At the psychological level, the impunity of violence makes the affected women feel helpless non-subjects. When legal justice turns out to be futile and all action is frustrated from the outset, fatalism often lurks around the corner. That this has a further passivating effect on the Dalit women and their communities needs hardly to be said. Kamala Devi experienced the full scale futility of any kind of justice when a neighbouring landowner from the dominant caste illegally appropriated some of the marginal plot of land on which Kamala Devi lives with her family. Her formal and informal protests brought nothing but a broad range of threats from the landowner and the members of his caste. When Kamala Devi complained openly about his ongoing expansion, the man abused her and her sister-in-law badly. Nobody in the village reported the incident to the police. Finally the threats grew so serious that Kamala Devi decided it was better to keep silent and let the man continue his illegal occupation. In spite of her fear and frustration, she would still like to continue to seek justice.



## **CONSTITUTIONAL LAWS IN INDIA**

Equality before the law of all citizens (Article 14)

Non-discrimination on the basis of caste and gender (Article 15(1))

The right to life and security of life (Article 21)

Protection of Dalits from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46)

Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989

## **INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966

International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination 1965

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1994

# ACTION

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## ACTION AGAINST IMPUNITY

What, then, is currently being done? At the government level, the Parliamentary Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the body involved with the rights of Dalits and other underprivileged groups, has acknowledged that the impunity of violence against Dalit women has severe consequences. It reports also on the rapidly increasing rate of violence and crime against Dalits and calls for the central government to take action. In its five-year plan of 2002-2007, the government gives priority to the empowerment of socially disadvantaged groups, among whom Dalits and women. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of 2001 has as its main objective the elimination of discrimination and violence against women. Also the National Human Rights Commission has made recommendations for the protection of Dalits against untouchability practices and atrocities and for the promotion of Dalit human rights, among other things by monitoring the justice system and the police. Women themselves, disillusioned as most of them are about the working of the government and the legal system, tend to search for help on a more immediate level. Their demand is first and foremost: support mechanisms for establishing their right to participate in mainstream society. In fact, many Dalit women continue, against all odds, to insist on decent human treatment. Vinnarasi, a 30 year-old agricultural labourer who was sexually assaulted by dominant caste men because of a petty incident, also saw her husband beaten by the same men, so badly that he cannot work anymore. Thanks to the backing of human rights organisations and lawyers, Vinnarasi's complaints to the police were successful. The men were arrested but were soon released. They are now trying to make peace with Vinnarasi

and her husband, but she is very determined not to give up before the perpetrators are punished.

When psychological and legal backing is guaranteed, many women are in fact willing to testify in public against the violence and the perpetrators. Sometimes they do so even at the cost of their own safety. Rohini Devi, a woman from a village in which gang rapes keep on terrifying the Dalit community, has decided to fight for justice through the legal system with the assistance of a local NGO. When asked if she would testify, she answered: 'Yes. I may lose my life in the process, but I want to live with dignity.' The NGO took her case seriously and organised a public meeting in the village, where Rohini Devi explicitly challenged other Dalits to join her action. Since then she is admired for her courage by the Dalit community, who now consider her as the Dalit leader of the village.

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#### DALIT WOMEN'S RIGHTS - A GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

It goes without saying that the impunity of violence and the silence surrounding it must be broken. This is not only a question of helping Dalit women to escape situations in which they are subject to violence, but of putting an end to the violence as such. Before this can be done, the social and political forces that allow the impunity must stop. At stake are the lives of 80 million women in India. Dalit women must have the possibility to empower themselves socially, economically and politically. They need equal opportunities in terms of access to education, healthcare, housing, work and other socio-economic resources. They also need a political voice. Only in such a way can they gain control over their lives and be able to resist situations in which they are subject to violence.

Most urgently, there is the demand by Dalit and human rights activists to abolish all untouchability practices. As we have seen, untouchability

often leads to overt violence. But the responsibility for the human rights of Dalit women is not only in the hands of Indian activists and NGOs. The international community of NGOs, politicians, human rights advocates, press and other involved individuals and groups must give publicity to the problem and urge their own governments and international bodies to take action. The responsibility is global.

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### WHAT ABOUT THE MDGs?

The responsibility is nowhere more clear than in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the eight specific goals written in the 2000 Millennium Declaration that is accepted by 189 countries, among which India<sup>3</sup>. With regard to schooling, child mortality, maternal death, healthcare and other basic human parameters, Dalit women and girls score unacceptably low. This is allowed to happen in a country that otherwise boasts about its economic, technological and political development. Therefore, it would not seem unreasonable to assume that realisation of the human rights of Dalit women would contribute importantly to the realisation of the MDGs as such. As we have seen, the future of Dalit women does not seem bright unless something changes very soon. Here, if ever, there is no excuse to pretend that the problem is so immense that we do not know where to start. We *do* know. End the impunity of violence against Dalit women.

3 The MDGs are: reduction of extreme poverty and hunger by half; primary education for all boys and girls; gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality by two-thirds; reduction of maternal mortality by three-quarters; combat HIV/aids, malaria and other diseases; clean drinking water; and 100 million slum dwellers above the poverty line; more aid, fair trade, less debt.

**CORDAID** combines more than 90 years of experience and expertise in emergency aid and structural poverty eradication. We are one of the biggest development organisations in the Netherlands with a network of almost a thousand partner organisations in 36 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Cordaid has an annual budget of around 170 million euros, of which over 30 million euros is available for emergency aid. A small part is spent in the Netherlands on lobby, public support and consciousness-raising.

Cordaid is the moving spirit behind the Dutch fundraising brands Memisa, Mensen in Nood, Vastenaktie and Kinderstem.

Cordaid is a non-governmental organisation with a Catholic tradition. Our inspiration is based on Catholic Social Teaching. Cordaid strongly believes that everyone has the right to a decent human life, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion or political conviction. Cordaid's vision on development cooperation envisages building on the people's own strength to improve their livelihoods. Capacity building and changing the balances of power that maintain social injustice and exclusion, are Cordaid's primary focuses.

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**CMC MENSEN MET EEN MISSIE** is the Dutch catholic missionary development agency. For 75 years CMC consequently stands on the side of people who live in hope in times of adversity and suppression. People who take their fate in their own hands, who are actively involved in activities for justice and peace and who fight for a humane existence, especially in impoverished countries.

**CMC** finances small-scale projects in countries of the South that support vulnerable groups and that contribute to a church directed at society. The agency mediates in the placement of missionary workers who are strongly involved in the struggle of the common man and woman. **CMC** stands for a long lasting commitment with its partners. Next to that, **CMC** makes a stand for the interests of Dutch missionaries.

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**JUSTITIA ET PAX NETHERLANDS** is the catholic human rights organisation, established in 1968 by the Dutch Bishops' Conference. Justitia et Pax defends human rights, social justice, a society that is accommodating and safe for all its members. Justitia et Pax engages in studies and action based on the Catholic social teaching. This task is translated into individual initiatives, the provision of services and advice to the Bishops' Conference and also into focused forms of cooperation with relevant human right organisations.

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**THE DALIT NETWORK NETHERLANDS (DNN) consists of six Dutch organizations aiming to combat caste and similar forms of discrimination worldwide. DNN consists of Cordaid, CMC, ICCO, Justitia et Pax, Churchinaction and the India Committee of the Netherlands. DNN focuses in The Netherlands on awareness raising among the public and advocacy towards the Dutch government and the corporate sector. Some members of DNN also support programmes in caste affected countries and are involved in capacity building in the struggle against caste discrimination.**

**DNN is a member of the International Dalit Solidarity Network. It actively participates in the international advocacy work aimed at the European Union, the United Nations and the promotion of the Ambedkar Principles among the corporate sector. DNN, more specifically its members Cordaid, CMC and Justitia et Pax, organized an international conference on the human rights of Dalit women in November 2006.**

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**THE INTERNATIONAL DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK (IDSN), formed in March 2000, is a network of organizations from countries affected by caste discrimination, national solidarity networks, and international organisations combating caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent. IDSN campaigns against caste-based discrimination, as experienced by the Dalits of South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), the Buraku people of Japan, the Al-Akdham of Yemen and low caste groups in several African countries like Somalia, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya.**

**The work of IDSN involves encouraging the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, the corporate sector and other institutions to recognise and act against the fact that over 260 million people continue to be treated as outcasts and less than human and that caste-based discrimination must be regarded as an international human rights issue.**

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