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European Parliament: Ensure that Dalits benefit from EU-India Free Trade Agreement

In a report on the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) the European Parliament (EP) calls on the European Council and Commission to work together with the Indian Government to move towards ending caste based discrimination, which affects more than 166 million Dalits in India. It urges the EU to ensure that the FTA is not harmful to Dalits and that the potential benefits reach all members of society. According to the EP, this should be part of an ‘ambitious sustainable development chapter’ in the FTA.

Copenhagen, Denmark (IDSN) March 27, 2009 --- The report of the European Parliament includes specific recommendations for improving the situation of Dalits and refers to the [European Parliament resolution adopted on 1 February 2007](#) on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India. The term Dalit covers those people who are beneath the Indian caste system and therefore often considered ‘untouchable’ and subjected to caste discrimination.

The report requests that the European Union specifically, “Press the Indian government to tackle the issue of bonded labour, which affects millions of people – largely from the Dalit and Adivasi [indigenous groups] community,” observing that, “it is believed this issue is not being adequately addressed due to lack of administrative and political will.”

The European Parliament (EP) notes that, “despite sustained economic growth, vast inequalities persist, with more than 800 million people surviving on less than 2 USD a day.” The EP is particularly concerned about underprivileged sections of the population including, “victims of discrimination such as Dalits and Adivasi” It also points out that these groups, “experience the least progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals” and “continue to face discrimination in relation to access to housing, education, employment, health care and other services.”

The EP therefore, “Calls on the Council and the Commission to work together with the Indian government to improve the situation of those groups [including Dalits and Adivasi] and to examine future cooperation as to their contribution towards ending gender and caste discrimination with reference to its above-mentioned resolution on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India.”

This report is strongly welcomed by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), as concrete action on this issue is long overdue and desperately needed if India’s Dalits are to sustain any hope for a better future.

For more information or interviews on the issue of caste-based discrimination and the human rights violations directly associated with it, please do not hesitate to contact Gerard Oonk, Co-convenor of IDSN and Co-ordinator of the Dalit Network Netherlands, on +31-30-2321340 or g.oonk@indianet.nl. Further information and resources can also be found on www.idsn.org including a [factsheet with specific information on the Dalits of India](#).

[The full report is available on the European Parliament website](#)

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Background:

- Caste discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as work and descent, commonly originating from a division of society into castes or social categories. This chronic human rights condition, which is associated with the notion of impurity, pollution and practices of 'untouchability', involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
- Those who are beneath the entire caste system – and are therefore literally 'outcaste' as well as 'untouchable' – call themselves 'Dalits'.
- There are officially 166 million Dalits in India – NGO and expert estimates however, say the figure is closer to 200 million.
- The Dalits of India are impoverished and excluded, abused and humiliated, denied justice, exploited and considered untouchable.
- The Dalits are subject to modern day slavery in the form of bonded labour practices and the forced assignment of dangerous and demeaning duties.
- Dalits in the labour market are commonly not ensured the same rights as others and are left out of agreements on corporate social responsibility due to their status as a virtual 'non-people'.

Photos and Interviews:

- For interviews with Gerard Oonk, Co-convenor of IDSN and Co-ordinator of the Dalit Network Netherlands, please call +31-30-2321340 (office) or +31-30-651015260 (mobile) or email g.oonk@indianet.nl
- For interviews with IDSN's Co-ordinator Rikke Nöhrind please contact IDSN on +45 35245080 or info@idsn.org.
- Please contact IDSN on +45 35245080 or info@idsn.org for photos – we have a good stock of high quality photos of Dalits in India taken by award winning photographer Jakob Carlsen – available for licensing from the photographer. For examples please see the [online exhibition](#).

Further Information:

- The IDSN website – www.idsn.org provides a wide range of resources and material on the topic of caste-discrimination including case studies, video materials, and material directly relating to the situation in India.
- Contact IDSN on +45 35245080 or info@idsn.org for more information on the topic.