



PRESS ADVISORY

Durban Review Conference: Break the UN silence on caste discrimination

260 million people worldwide suffer from caste discrimination and are being silenced by the Durban Review Conference, which claims to aim at protecting all victims affected by discrimination and contemporary forms of racism. To break this silence, Human Rights Watch, IDSN, NCDHR and other human rights organizations, have issued a joint position paper calling on the conference to address this crucial issue.

April 20, 2009 -- Caste discrimination constitutes one of the most serious and widespread global human rights challenges today. Victims of caste discrimination suffer a hidden apartheid of segregation, modern-day slavery and other forms of severe discrimination as a result of having been born into a marginalized and stigmatised social group or caste. It is therefore deeply concerning that the Durban Review Conference is failing to tackle this type of discrimination and thereby silencing much needed debate on one of the most brutal and systematic forms of discrimination in the world today.

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Human Rights Watch (HRW), the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and other human rights organisations, are challenging this silence in a [joint position paper](#) urging UN member states to address caste-based discrimination at the Durban Review Conference, taking place in Geneva from the 20-24 April.

With the pending failure to address this issue at the UN conference, it is crucial that the problem is addressed in the public arena and through the media. This global human rights issue, affecting 260 million people worldwide, is currently being exemplified in the electoral process in India, where it is being reported that Dalit (or "low caste") citizens are being threatened, assaulted, and physically prevented from voting in the ongoing election campaign. The website [dalitvotes.in](#) offers up to date insight into this problem, which is eroding the very roots of the world's largest democracy.

A press conference about caste discrimination and the Durban Review Conference has been organised at the UN premises in Geneva on the 20th April at 5:30pm. A panel of Dalit representatives and NGO speakers will be available for questions and further information. Journalists must be accredited to the conference to attend. More information on the conference will be posted on [idsn.org](#).

A number of [events are also being organised in Geneva from the 19-24th April](#), to bring visibility to the issue of caste based discrimination and its crucial relevance to the Durban Review Conference.

IDSN offers a comprehensive [press kit including an overview of the issues, a list of relevant events and interview profiles](#) for the many Dalit representatives travelling to Geneva to raise their voices on behalf of the millions of victims of caste based discrimination. Most of these representatives are also available at the UN premises for interviews during the conference, as well as telephone or national interviews following the conference.

Please do not hesitate to contact us on mb@idsn.org or +45 61701218 for further information on the topic, relevant documents, case studies or interviews with Dalit representatives.

[> Press kit for journalists](#)

[> Programme of Dalit solidarity events at the Durban Review Conference and the Civil Society Forum](#)

[> Joint position paper prepared by IDSN, Human Rights Watch, NCDHR and other organisations.](#)

[> More information about the Durban Review Conference](#)

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. It is estimated that 260 million people are affected by caste discrimination worldwide.
- The Durban Review Conference will be held in Geneva between 20-24 April 2009 with the purpose of reviewing the implementation of the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action \(DDPA\)](#).
- The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (DDPA) includes several provisions relevant in the fight against this form of discrimination, and several UN bodies, in particular the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), have repeatedly reaffirmed that caste falls under the Race Convention.
- Several UN bodies have furthermore reaffirmed that [discrimination based on work and descent](#) - the UN terminology for caste discrimination - is prohibited by international human rights law, and that it is a global human rights phenomenon which should be addressed comprehensively through existing human rights mechanisms.
- Human Rights Watch have also previously highlighted the need for tackling the causes and consequences of this kind of discrimination by, among other things, encouraging delegations to welcome the work carried out by CERD on discrimination based on descent, to review CERD's General Comment No. 29 on Descent, and to include reference to it as a guiding opinion in defining and combating descent-based discrimination.

Photos and Interviews:

- [Press Kit](#): includes an overview of the issues, a list of relevant events and interview profiles for the many Dalit representatives travelling to Geneva to raise their voices on behalf of the millions of victims of caste based discrimination. Many of these representatives are also available for interviews during the conference, and for interviews after the conference in their own countries.
- Photos: Please contact IDSN on +45 61701218 or mb@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 research materials. [For more information on the Durban Review Conference please see the overview](#) on the IDSN website.
- **Contact IDSN on +45 61701218 or mb@idsn.org for more information on the topic.**