

Press Release NCDHR (May 24, 2012)

Dalit rights activists enraged at the failure of Indian delegations to address questions raised at the UN

Geneva, May 24, 2012 - Dalit rights activists gathered in Geneva are disappointed at the Indian delegation's immediate response to the real challenges that Dalits face, when India was reviewed at the UN Universal Periodic Review of India on 24 May.

Activists comment that the delegation failed to adequately address concerns about strengthening the Prevention of Atrocities Act, bringing in Anti-discrimination law, the socio economic development of SC and ST, and caste and gender intersectionality, among a number of other key concerns.

Taking note of caste discrimination being a root cause of serious human rights violations affecting more than 166 million people in India, 12 countries directly raised concerns about caste discrimination and made some relevant suggestions to address the abhorrent practice. A further two countries mentioned manual scavenging as a concern.

India's report and response to questions was limited to a listing of references to legislative measures, affirmative action and budget allocations put in place to stop caste discrimination. But Dalit rights activists say that while the Indian government should be commended for putting these measures in place, implementation of legislation on the ground is severely lacking, there is no monitoring mechanism to oversee affirmative action policies, and budgets allocated for Dalits are routinely diverted and misspent.

"A lack of access to justice for Dalits and widespread impunity for crimes committed against them has meant the measures taken by the Government to combat caste discrimination are not followed through and are not actually benefiting victims," says Paul Divakar of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights.

Ghana, Japan, Thailand USA, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, Germany, Holy See, Hungary, Japan, Luxemburg, Norway brought up caste discrimination or Dalits directly, while other states raised issues related to caste discrimination in education, discrimination in the judiciary, and manual scavenging.

"While the Indian Government may have good intentions which are followed up with new legislations for the protection of the rights of the under privileged, intentions not followed through with proper monitoring and implementation will not help change the reality for millions of Dalits who continue to be put at a severe disadvantage," said Manjula Pradeep, Director of Navsarjan Trust and long time advocate for Dalit rights.

"Although gender concerns formed a significant part of the questions raised, the particular increased risk and vulnerability of Dalit women due multiple discrimination remains unaddressed by the Indian delegation, following today's review," said Asha Kowtal, General Secretary, All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch.

In its concluding remarks the Indian delegation declared India, 'a country willing to acknowledge and address weaknesses ... willing to promote and protect the human rights of its people.' Dalit rights activists are now looking forward to a more constructive engagement of the Government in future

on introducing anti-discrimination and equality legislation and directly addressing the many issues raised by states and civil society in relation to the persistence of caste discrimination in India.

More Information:

- Questions and Recommendations on caste by UN member states at the UPR review on 24th May:
http://www.idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/New_files/India/2012/IndiaUPR2012_CasteStatements.pdf
- UPR India 2012: Briefing note with key recommendations and question - Caste discrimination in India:
http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/New_files/UN/UPR/UPR_India_2012_Recommendations.pdf
- UPR submission - Coalition report by National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights:
http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/New_files/UN/UPR/UPR_India2012_NCDHR.pdf