

INVITATION TO A PUBLIC HEARING

“END CASTE DISCRIMINATION”

organised by the Dalit Solidarity Network in Denmark in association with IDSN

Monday 29 October 2012, 16-18.30 at DIIS, Strandgade 71, 1401 København K

Caste discrimination is one of the world's most serious human rights issues and a main cause of poverty. Affecting an estimated 260 million people, mostly in South Asia where they are known as Dalits, caste discrimination leads to massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Campaigners for Dalit rights from South Asia as well as representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Danish and international NGOs and the Danish Institute for Human Rights will present their perspectives on current challenges, good practices and ways forward to end caste discrimination.

Minister for Development Cooperation, Christian Friis Bach, will open the hearing.

Programme

Please don't be late - the event must start on time!

16.00 **Welcome** by DSN-DK chair, Kirsten Hjørnholm Sørensen, and moderator Knud Vilby

16.05 **Opening Speech** by Minister for Development Cooperation, Christian Friis Bach

16.15 **'We are not untouchable'**: Screening of the IDSN documentary 'We are not untouchable' followed by comments on the situation of Dalits in India by **Indian filmmaker and human rights activist, Stalin K.**

16.40 **Seeking justice for Dalits**: Katia Chirizzi, Senior Advisor, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

16:55 **Caste discrimination – a cross cutting human rights and poverty concern**: Asha Kowtal, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India

17:10 **Q&A session**

17:30 **Panel Discussion: Challenges, good practices, and ways forward to eliminate caste discrimination** in the context of prevention of torture, poverty elimination, human rights and international advocacy

- Jan Ole Haagensen, Director of the International Department, Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims
- Jørgen Thomsen, Asia Regional Coordinator, DanChurchAid
- Charlotte Flindt Pedersen, Deputy Director, The Danish Institute for Human Rights
- Rikke Nöhrind, Coordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network

18:00 **Debate**

18.25 **Closing remarks**

18:30 Refreshments

Please confirm your attendance to info@dalit.dk no later than 25 October (and preferably sooner)

Background

Caste discrimination is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world. Based on the notion of 'untouchability', it affects an estimated 260 million people worldwide. It involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and denies whole communities of 'untouchables', also called Dalits, a life in dignity and equality. Caste discrimination is a global human rights issue. The majority of victims live in South Asia, but similar forms of discrimination exist in Japan, Yemen, numerous African countries and diaspora communities.

'Untouchability practices'

So-called untouchability practices are a key feature of caste discrimination. They stem from the notion that different caste groups are born with varying degrees of purity. Groups that fall outside the caste system are considered 'lesser human beings', 'impure' and thus 'polluting' to other caste groups. They are known to be 'untouchable' and are subjected to 'untouchability practices'. In South Asia, these practices are rooted in the Hindu caste system.

Common untouchability practices include segregation in housing, schools and burial grounds, prohibition of access to and ownership of land, restriction on occupation (Dalits are assigned menial, dirty and dangerous jobs), prohibition of inter-caste marriage, and limitation or prohibition of access to roads, temples, tea houses, water and sanitation, health care, education and other public places and services. In spite of special legislation and policy measures against caste discrimination, Dalits continue to be socially, politically and economically excluded. Many of them live in poverty with very limited access to development processes, decision making and participation in public and civil life.

Impunity

When caste-affected groups challenge untouchability practices, they often face social boycott and violent sanctions that are frequently carried out in public in order to intimidate whole communities. A lack of enforcement of legislation and limited access to justice for Dalits leaves them with little protection.



Campaign to 'end caste discrimination'

The short documentary, 'We are not untouchable,' is being launched as part of an international campaign to end caste discrimination. The film is produced by IDSN and focuses on human rights violations against Dalits in various South Asian Countries as well as Yemen. The footage has been collected from Dalit community video volunteers, documentary filmmakers, and NGOs.

IDSN has also launched an international facebook campaign which is aimed at the general public as well as political decision makers in the EU. By clicking 'like' on the site www.endcaste.com you can express your support for the struggle to end caste discrimination.

**END CASTE
DISCRIMINATION**

DSN-DK and IDSN

The Dalit Solidarity Network in Denmark works on a national level to stimulate political action and raise public awareness of caste discrimination. DSN-DK is a member of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) which works on a global level to eradicate this form of discrimination. Read more here: www.idsn.org and www.dalit.dk



This event has been organized with the financial support of the European Union. The contents are the sole responsibility of IDSN and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU.