



2022 annual report

IDSN

International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

2022 annual report

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2022 Highlights

- Young Dalit leaders participate in the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights and UN Forum on Minority Issues
- Briefings and calls to action on the situation of Dalits in Pakistan prioritised in EU and UN processes
- Input submitted to the UN UPRs of India and Pakistan and recommendations on caste were made by States
- Facilitated Dalit representation from Sri Lanka at the EU NGO Forum and key EU meetings with officials
- Co-organised the UN OHCHR round table on addressing caste and business-related human rights issues
- Co-organised session on caste discrimination in garment and footwear supply chains at the OECD Forum
- UN Special Rapporteurs on slavery and poverty respectively cited caste discrimination as a root cause in their reports
- Successfully conducted training workshops for network members and affiliates on engaging with the EU
- Gathered Dalit Solidarity Networks and International Associates at meetings to discuss strategies
- Ensured that caste and the situation of Dalit women was reflected in the European Parliament human rights report
- A Dalit woman was appointed UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism
- IDSN was finally granted UN ECOSOC status after fighting for it for 15 years

Foreword

Dear friends and supporters of the International Dalit Solidarity Network,

Welcome to the Annual Report 2022. A year which finally saw IDSN being granted ECOSOC Consultative status after a 15-year wait. We can now hold our heads high as we enter the Palais des Nations in Geneva with our own badges and our own identity.

In addition, 2022 saw the appointment of the first ever Dalit and that too a Dalit woman as a United Nations Special Rapporteur in charge of the Racism mandate. How we all celebrated that remarkable achievement.

Our three main thematic objectives remain - Dalit Women and Gender Justice; Business and Human Rights; and Equality and Participation.

We have continued to work with the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies at the UN in Geneva and have made several submissions to inform Special Rapporteurs during their country visits – these have been highlighted in the report.

Our work at the EU has been strengthened thanks to our EU Adviser. The inroads that we have made have helped embed the issue of caste discrimination within the heart of the EU delegations in-country as well as in Brussels. Furthermore, the training our members have received has helped them better understand how to advocate at the EU – the parliament and its institutions, as well as the delegations in their own countries.

Our special thanks to the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues for his ongoing support and commitment to addressing caste and descent-based discrimination. He has ensured it is firmly placed in the mandate and we hope that whoever is the new incoming mandate holder, they too will dedicate some space to ensuring that Dalits really do have a place at the table.

By increasing and broad-basing our network in key countries affected by caste, we have added even more voices to the global campaign. IDSN would not be the force it is today without everyone in the network. Their passion and commitment make us who we are and throughout our work our members are front and centre.

As always, particular thanks to the IDSN Board and the small but mightily powerful Secretariat who have worked tirelessly to ensure ending caste discrimination remains high on the human rights agenda and to reiterate that #DalitLivesMatter.

So, once again, thank you to all who contribute to our work in big or small ways. Our work here has not ended, but together we can try to make the world a better place.

Meena Varma

Executive Director - IDSN

Dalit Women and Gender Justice

Caste and gender justice is a key thematic priority for IDSN. In 2022, multiple issues affecting Dalit women across the globe were raised by IDSN at the UN and the EU and through IDSN's communications channels. Human rights affected by the intersection of caste and gender discrimination were highlighted in our submissions and briefings at the international level and reflected in reports by UN Special Rapporteurs and EU bodies. Issues raised included rape and violence, online harassment and violations of the right to health, decent work and basic services, that affect Dalit women and girls deeply.

This year IDSN also focused on ensuring a broader participation of younger Dalit women leaders in our advocacy efforts, events, trainings and meetings. The appointment of Dalit activist, Ashwini K.P., as the new UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Racism in late 2022, was especially welcomed by IDSN. In this chapter we share some of the highlights of IDSN's work over the past year on Dalit women and gender justice.

Dalit women central to IDSN's UN recommendations

IDSN issued recommendations for the [49th](#), [50th](#) and [51st](#) session of the UN Human Rights Council, as well as joint input to the [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR). In the recommendations, concern and the need for action on Dalit women and gender justice were raised as a central theme.

Recommendations included concern over Dalit women and forced labour, forced prostitution and other sexual exploitation, abductions and forced conversions, hate-speech, exclusion and marginalisation. The recommendations were followed up by advocacy meetings and further interactions throughout the year.

IDSN also submitted [input](#) to the Office of the High Commissioner on the issue of Dalits and child, early and forced marriage in Pakistan.

Caste and gender justice raised in EU country consultations

The rights of Dalit women and girls were also integrated by IDSN in all relevant country consultations organised by the EU in Brussels, ahead of its human rights consultations with the Governments of Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India. IDSN invited members and associate experts to speak about the issue in online meetings.

Joint UN submission on the right to health of Dalit women

In August, The Sexual Rights Initiative, National Council of Women Leaders (NCWL), Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet), AWID, Her Rights Initiative (HRI) and IDSN worked together to create a submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to inform the elaboration of its General Recommendation n°37 on racial discrimination and the right to health. The submission argues that states must take an intersectional approach in all aspects of healthcare provision. The absence of which will compromise people's rights to health, bodily autonomy and non-discriminatory services, especially among the marginalised. The [report](#) also details case studies on caste-based oppression in India, as well as citing cases of Dalits in other caste-affected countries in South Asia.

“Caste-based discrimination and oppression continue to prevent millions of people in South Asia (and elsewhere) from realising their rights to health and healthcare. In addition to historical exclusion ... Dalit and Adivasi communities are further dispossessed of their rights through the attitudes and treatment they receive in healthcare institutions. Dalit women face specific barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare.”

IDSN Joint Submission to CERD



IDSN UN Delegation 2022. Photos by IDSN

Dalit voices raised at the UN Forum on Minority Issues

IDSN delegates from South Asia raised the human rights issues faced by Dalits, at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in December. Speaking on the panel and from the floor, young Dalit human rights defenders from India and Nepal shared their experience of discrimination and injustice and their thoughts on the way forward for their communities.

Poonam Mohtey, Project Coordinator at Samata Foundation in Nepal, spoke on the [panel](#) 'Rethink: Minority rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the Declaration'. She spoke as a Dalit woman and rights defender, who has experienced intersecting forms of discrimination throughout her life and in her work. She noted that the situation of Dalit women worldwide is a widely forgotten issue and "a minority within a minority". She called on the international community to open more opportunities to better articulate Dalit women's agency and voice, mobilise resources and protect their rights.

IDSN's Executive Director, Meena Varma, spoke as a panelist at the [side-event](#). She spoke about the importance of hearing the voices of Dalit rights defenders and pleaded for a greater inclusion of these defenders at the various UN fora.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues also spoke at the side-event, identifying an opportunity to reform the UN minority instruments to include descent-based communities and address challenges such as hate-speech and intersectionality.

Delegates also participated in the programme of the Forum and Pameela K. P. from the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), prepared a statement, that due to time constraints was not presented live, however the [statement](#) was shared on the IDSN YouTube channel.

Speaking out against caste discrimination at the Women at Work Conference

In September, the global 'Women at Work' conference organised by the Norwegian Human Rights Fund, brought together, activists, experts, trade unions and several international NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and IDSN. The conference took place in Kathmandu, Nepal.

In a session dedicated to addressing caste-based discrimination, the exploitation of Dalit women in work settings was raised by speakers at the conference in Nepal, stressing the urgent need to address the situation.

The conference looked at sexual and gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace and at home; labour rights and reforms for women and girl workers; and mobilising women workers in the informal sector. Participants from South Asia shared their experiences, discussed the issues and challenges faced by working women and noted how caste and intersectionality affects and further marginalises women and girl workers in both formal and informal sectors.

Mr Karuppusamy, from IDSN Affiliate - Rights Education and Development Centre (READ), spoke at the event as did Mr Akram Khaskheli, an agricultural workers rights activist from Hari Welfare Association and Mr Pirbhu Satyani, from the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), representing IDSN.

UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Tomoya Obokata, spoke about his most recent report highlighting that root causes of slavery and bonded labour are social exclusion, poverty and caste discrimination.

Violations against Dalits in Pakistan raised

IDSN participated in the EU's civil society consultation in June, ahead of the EU-Pakistan Sub-Group on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, ensuring the EU had

information on the situation of Dalits in Pakistan. The EU raised the issue under the "minority rights" agenda point.

IDSN furthermore advocated with the Chairperson of the Pakistan National Human Rights Commission, for more determined action by the PNHR on judicial investigation and monitoring on human rights abuse in Sindh, including violations against Dalit women such as rape, abductions and forced conversion.

In September, the persistence of caste discrimination in Pakistan was raised at the UN Human Rights Council side event 'Minorities subjected to contemporary forms of slavery: addressing a global concern', where Mary James Gill, Executive Director, Center for Law & Justice (Pakistan) spoke about the plight of sanitation workers in Pakistan. The side-event was organised by Minority Rights Group International.

In the context of the UPR Pakistan Pre-session, IDSN held meetings with missions in Geneva to advocate for recommendations on caste discrimination, presenting key points of concern and requesting specific recommendations in the SMART method designed by the UN UPR Info mechanism. During the meetings, IDSN focused [materials](#) were shared with diplomats addressing specific issues facing Dalit women in Pakistan, including abductions and forced conversions.

Online harassment of Dalit women raised

In October, IDSN ensured that the EU and UN were briefed about online hate and harassment experienced by Dalit women, ahead of the 2023 session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), on 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'.

A consultation was organised by the EU and UN where the EU adviser spoke and presented a briefing [paper](#), suggesting EU and UN action in this regard.



Dr. Ashwini K.P. (centre) appointed UN SR on Racism in 2022 taking part in an IDSN delegation to the UN in 2014. Photo by IDSN

Dalit woman appointed UN Special Rapporteur on Racism

In November, IDSN welcomed the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Dr. Ashwini K.P., to the post. Dr. K.P. brings with her valuable knowledge and insight on discrimination based on work and descent to the United Nations.

In 2014, Dr. K.P. was part of an IDSN delegation to the UN Human Rights Council, participating in the 26th Session side-event on caste-based violence against women. She has noted that her participation sparked her interest in working with the UN and IDSN is proud to have been a small part of the journey that led Dr. K.P. to the post of UN Special Rapporteur.

“Belonging to a marginalised community myself, an Indian Dalit woman, working on issues related to descent and occupation based discrimination has been part of my professional space, research and activism and are not new to me.”

Dr. Ashwini K.P., UN Special Rapporteur on Racism

India rights review: Action on caste discrimination recommended by States across three continents

During the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of India on 10th November, the country received [recommendations](#) on caste, including the need to ensure implementation of legislation to protect Dalits from discrimination and violence, develop an action plan to prevent caste discrimination in labour, protect Dalit women and girls from violence and sexual abuse, ensure equal access to services and to step up efforts to end caste discrimination. The recommendations came from countries in South America, Africa and Europe.

Ahead of the review IDSN made a joint [submission](#) to the process outlining the many human rights violations faced by Dalits in India as well as engaging in advocacy efforts to sensitise States to the issue. The report was submitted by IDSN, The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Advocating Rights in South Asia – ARISA, Dalit Solidarity Network Norway (DSNNO) and Dalit Solidarity Network Finland (DSNFi). IDSN and network affiliates took part in the pre-session and monitored the UPR proceedings.

UN Slavery expert highlights discrimination as main cause of contemporary forms of slavery



The Special Rapporteur on Slavery, Dr. Tomoya Obokata, presented his [report](#) focusing on the Contemporary forms of slavery affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities at the 51st Session of the UN Human Rights Council in September. Child labour and caste-based discrimination are closely interlinked alongside severe discrimination against Dalit women.

The report explores the main causes of slavery that affect minorities, such as chattel slavery, forced and bonded labour, child and/or forced marriage, domestic servitude, sexual slavery and child labour.

Alongside Dalits, the Special Rapporteur highlighted the vulnerabilities and exploitation of Uyghur, Yazidi, Rohingya and Roma people, and people of African Descent.

Dr. Obokata recognised that minority communities suffer from deep rooted discrimination and minority women and girls from these communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, ethnic prejudice, stigmatisation and gender-based restrictions.

Despite the positive developments made to address these issues, the Rapporteur calls for much more to be done and sets out a number of recommendations urging States to eliminate discrimination against minorities, adopt temporary special measures and ensure access to free education.

Ahead of the report IDSN submitted [input](#) to the mandate on this topic. IDSN also took part in the Interactive Dialogue on the report in September 2022, where caste was raised.

EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT

People discriminated against on the basis of work and descent represent one example. They are bound by their inherited status and subjected to dehumanizing discourses that refer to “pollution” or “untouchability”, with no respect for human dignity and equality. Consequently, such people have limited freedom to renounce inherited occupations or degrading or hazardous work and are often subjected to debt bondage without sufficient access to justice ... Dalit women in South Asia face severe discrimination, and as a result they are systematically denied choices and freedoms in all spheres of life. Consequently, their access to services and resources is very limited, increasing their risk of being subjected to contemporary forms of slavery.

Bonded labour continues to be prevalent among people discriminated against on the basis of work and descent, such as Dalits in South Asia ... In India, child labour, caste-based discrimination and poverty are closely interlinked.

Manual scavenging, predominantly carried out by Dalit women, is widely regarded as forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery, entailing harsh working conditions that have a negative impact on mental and physical health. Another sector disproportionately represented by women and girls is the garment/textile industry, where indicators of forced labour, such as restriction of movement, low or no wages, and forcible taking of medicine to suppress menstruation, have been reported.

Business and Human Rights

IDSN continued its focus on the intersection of caste discrimination and labour rights in and beyond global supply chains. IDSN provided input at the EU and UN level on forced and bonded labour, caste related human rights violations in global supply chains and the need to include caste in international mandatory human rights due diligence frameworks. IDSN co-organised a round table with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on caste and business and an OECD Forum session on caste discrimination in the garment and leather supply chains.

An IDSN delegation of young Dalit leaders took part in the UN Business and Human Rights Forum with great success. Throughout the year IDSN also continued to actively participate in networks and webinars on business and human rights and took part in EU GSP+ discussions on Sri Lanka and Pakistan. In this chapter we look at the highlights from the 2022 business and human rights work.

Input to UN slavery mandate report

In February and March, IDSN submitted [input](#) on the deep linkages between caste and slavery, to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Slavery, for his study about slavery in the informal sector as well as [input](#) to the same mandates report on slavery and minorities.

EU forced labour initiative

In June, IDSN provided key [input](#) into the EU Forced Labour [Initiative](#), drawing the attention of the EU to forced and bonded labour experienced by Dalits, providing evidence and background information, and ensuring certain policy asks were taken into consideration. IDSN also worked on a joint civil society [letter](#), to the European Commission, to provide input on its initiative to combat forced labour through an import ban, suggesting ways to strengthen the provisions on violations throughout the value chain.

OECD caste session

Session on caste discrimination organised at the OECD Forum

In February 2022, IDSN co-organised the session 'Caste-based Discrimination: a salient risk in the garment and leather supply chains in South Asia.' The session was part of the 'OECD Forum on Due Diligence in the Garment and Footwear Sector'. This forum is an annual event during which topics linked to due diligence in clothing and footwear production chains are discussed by many different stakeholders.

The session was co-organised by IDSN, Advocating Rights in South Asia (Arisa), Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Rights Education and Development Centre (READ). It is the first time caste-based discrimination was on the official agenda during the OECD Forum. The session attracted many participants, including businesses, governments, civil society organisations and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

During the session and Q&A, organisers explained what caste discrimination is, why it is relevant to take it into account in production chains in South Asia, the role caste plays in the workplace and in production chains and how businesses can approach and address these questions and problems. Findings from studies that show several risks relating to caste discrimination in the clothing and shoe sector were also presented.



Tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka. Photo by: Christophe Meneboeuf, CC

Caste and business raised at the 51st UN Human Rights Council Session

In September, following IDSN's caste and business related [recommendations](#) for States for the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council, IDSN also took part in the side event 'Minorities subjected to contemporary forms of slavery: addressing a global concern'. At this event the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Tomoya Obokata, mentioned that he has reiterated requests for visits to countries that are affected by caste discrimination.

In the presentation of his [report](#) to the Human Rights Council, the Rapporteur underscored that Dalit women in South Asia face severe discrimination and are systematically denied choices and freedoms in all spheres of life. During the Interactive Dialogue, IDSN's associate IMADR delivered an oral [statement](#). They noted that many companies sourcing from South Asia are unaware of the role that caste plays in relation to who is forced into certain roles in supply chains and their vulnerability to exploitation.

Minority Rights Group International also made a statement during the [dialogue](#), drawing attention to the need to address the lasting legacies of slavery and caste discrimination and their structural impacts on mindsets and institutions. A [Guidance Note](#) on 'Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities' was released , at a workshop during the session, featuring a [case](#) on caste and descent-based discrimination.

Sri Lanka's GSP+ commitments and caste raised at EU level

In December, Dr Perumal Pichal Sivapragasam, Executive Director of IDSN's member, Human Development Organisation of Sri Lanka, was invited to the 2022 EU NGO Human Rights Forum. IDSN facilitated Dr. Sivapragasam's participation and organised EU advocacy meetings with the European Commission, European Parliament, EU External Action Service officials and EU civil society partners. At these meetings he advocated for stronger EU policies on caste-based discrimination in relation to the EU-Sri Lanka GSP+ agreement, and greater inclusion of Dalit representatives and issues in EU-Sri Lanka political dialogues, inter-parliamentary relations and EU projects.

There are several overlaps between caste discrimination, labour and human rights issues. Including in tea plantations where most workers are from marginalised castes and face exclusion from accessing rights and fair work. Briefings on caste and tea plantations in Sri Lanka were also shared with the EP and the European External Action Service ahead of the EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission on Human Rights.

Working with the Ethical Trading Initiative

IDSN continued its work with the various Ethical Trading Initiatives (ETI) in Europe and the IDSN Director penned a guest [blog post](#) for the ETI in the UK under the heading 'Caste is a salient risk for business, here's why'.

OHCHR round table on addressing business-related human rights issues and the intersections of caste

IDSN and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) minority section brought together an experts' round table discussion to mark the 30th Anniversary of the UN Minority mandate.

It was a rewarding two hours of discussion and sharing, with a very diverse group of speakers. With activists from all over South Asia, Japan and the USA, participants addressed descent and work-based discrimination (DWBD) and the intersectionality of caste and gender in the business setting.

Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, highlighted the fact that although those of 'particular concern' are explicitly mentioned in the UN 10+ Roadmap on business and human rights for the next decade, it fails to mention 'minorities' or 'Dalits'. He stressed that Dalits must be "explicitly referred to, acknowledged, and protected". We need to develop much more precise language and actions to address and improve those most excluded and 'left behind', he commented.

Tomoya Obokata, UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, committed his mandate to addressing the concerns of the DBWD communities and urged all civil society and stakeholders to input into his calls for submissions. He stressed that "voices of survivors of slavery must be heard to deepen understanding of experiences, especially with gender and other intersectional experiences, to ensure they are not left behind".

Fernanda Hopenhaym, Member of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights (WGBHR), noted that the working group has several tools which produce recommendations, but tools themselves are insufficient, and must be followed up on. She stressed the need to sensitise businesses to understand these issues and place them in the broader context of systematic reforms.



Martin Oelz, the Senior Specialist on Equality and Non-discrimination at the International Labour Organization (ILO), addressed the need for policy, strategies and more specific proactive measures. He also highlighted the ILO's openness to receiving information from civil society.

All speakers highlighted the intersectional discrimination that affects minority women, who tend to be particularly marginalised or excluded. Case studies from the floor gave evidence that Dalit women are disproportionately targets of sexual harassment and gender-based violence and only with a binding global agreement to address such violence and harassment, will it cease.

Several activists from India, Nepal, Pakistan and Japan spoke to give background on the specific issues happening in their country – with ongoing abuses of forced and bonded labour, as well as child labour, disproportionately affecting those from caste and descent-based communities. Many called for businesses, government and third-party organisations to step up and do more to ensure protection.

Peter McAllister, the Executive Director of the Ethical Trade Initiative in the UK, stressed the need for a breakaway from the compliance approach, to a genuine inquiry approach, in order to talk to rights holders. He closed the session by noting that to get caste onto the business agenda, we need to get the politicians to address these issues as well. The recordings of the sessions are available [online](#).



Priyanka Samy speaking on panel at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights. Photo by IDSN

Young Dalit leaders speak at the UN Forum on Business and Human rights

Young Dalit leaders from Nepal and India participated actively in the Forum, through statements from the floor, social media, interviews and in-person interactions during sessions, side-events and breaks. They shared their experiences and gathered new knowledge from the experiences of others.

Priyanka Samy, youth convener of the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), India, spoke on the panel in the debate “All Persons at the Centre: Confronting racism to catalyze the BHR agenda”, on the 30 November. She was joined by the new Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Dr. Ashwini K.P.

Racism is a recent issue debated by the Working Group on Business and Human Rights and IDSN welcomes the relevant debates, as there is a need to confront several challenges, such as caste and descent discrimination in global value chains.

During her statement on the panel, Ms. Samy underscored that policies influencing the market and business, are made without considering Dalit voices, further widening socio-economic inequalities. She also explained that caste inequality is a cultural, structural and political issue, requiring a political approach to achieve equality.

The IDSN delegation advocated for more visibility of Dalit voices in the debates on business and human rights at regional and global levels and also distributed briefing materials offering more information. They highlighted that business operations in caste-affected countries are at a significant risk of being based on the economic exploitation or seclusion of the caste-oppressed. Pointing out that violations often include sexual violence against Dalit women and girls, forced prostitution, debt bondage, modern slavery and denial of minimum work standards which all contribute to the perpetuation of discrimination.

Equality and Participation

Caste discrimination affects every aspect of the lives of those impacted, and participation of Dalits in societies, economies, processes and politics is key to changing the dynamics and ending caste discrimination.

Therefore equality and participation is cross-cutting in all of IDS N's work. In this chapter we look at some examples of IDS N's engagement at the UN and EU level to promote participation and trainings offered by IDS N.

Dalit defenders engage with the EU

The IDS N EU Adviser had a key focus this year on facilitating the engagement of Dalit rights defenders with EU delegations and officials, in country and in Brussels. Dalit defenders were consulted in briefings ahead of EU dialogues with Governments in countries affected by caste and the EU were put in touch with contacts in country.

IDS N ensured that new affiliate Parittran from Bangladesh was invited to speak at the debrief at the EU-Bangladesh Human Rights Subcommittee. Followed up by concrete initiatives, projects and technical dialogue throughout the year were discussed, as were the possibilities for participation in EU consultations in Bangladesh.

IDS N also facilitated the participation of IDS N member the Feminist Dalit Organization - Nepal (FEDO) in the civil society consultation with the EU, ahead of the EU-Nepal Human Rights Subcommittee, to ensure caste issues were raised during this dialogue.

European Parliament calls for the EU to intensify efforts to eliminate caste discrimination

In January 2022, the European Parliament's annual [report](#) on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter was adopted.

The report, "Notes with great concern the scale and consequences of caste hierarchies, caste-based discrimination and the perpetuation of caste-based human rights violations, including the denial of access to the legal system or employment, continued segregation, poverty and stigmatisation, and caste-related barriers to the exercise of basic human rights and the facilitation of human development." It calls for "the EU and its Member States to intensify efforts and support initiatives at the UN and in the relevant third countries to eliminate caste discrimination."

The report also calls for the eradication of forced labour and other forms of human rights abuses in supply chains and specifically, "calls on European companies to fulfil their corporate responsibility by undertaking a thorough review of their supply chains to ensure that they are not implicated in human rights abuses."

Caste raised at EU meeting with the UN expert on Freedom of Religion and Belief

In June, IDS N and a group of other civil society organisations met with Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, in Brussels.

Mr Shaheed was in Brussels to meet with the EU Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, and gather inputs for his next and last report.

In the meeting, IDS N raised the situation of Dalits in Pakistan and Bangladesh, while other NGOs in the room raised minority issues in India. The EU delegation was also there to record the recommendations coming from civil society.

Mr Shaheed took note of IDS N's calls and invited IDS N to input into his final report that will be delivered to the 77th Session of the General Assembly.

UN submissions on discrimination

In addition to the recommendations by IDSN for the [49th](#), [50th](#) and [51st](#) session of the UN Human Rights Council, as well as joint input to the [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) Universal Periodic Reviews mentioned in the previous chapters, IDSN offered input to several UN processes dealing with non-discrimination.

This included [input](#) to The Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development (EMRTD) study on racism, racial discrimination and the right to development, and [input](#) to the Report of the Secretary-General on “Concrete action for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow up to the Durban Declaration.” IDSN also made a [submission](#) to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with regard to racial justice and equality.

IDSN training for network members and affiliates on engaging with the EU

In September and October, IDSN ran beginners and intermediate level online workshops designed to help members and affiliates understand the EU mechanisms and how to best engage with them. IDSN organised the trainings to make EU human rights bodies and mechanisms more accessible to Dalit human rights defenders in the network.

IDSN’s EU adviser delivered the training, explaining what member organisations could gain from interacting with the EU, and offering background on the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European External Action Service.

She detailed how IDSN’s member organisations could best engage with these bodies, and who to reach out to on a local level. The members and affiliates who chose to join

the training are now aware of IDSN’s ways of working with the EU, the opportunities and the challenges.

Participants were very positive about the training, reporting that they felt increased confidence in engaging with the EU after the training. Participants also noted the next steps they were planning to take, to use the information learned at the training.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS IN THE EU TRAINING

“I will suggest my organisation to set up a meeting with EU Embassy/Delegation in Bangladesh and place our concerns and areas for cooperation to them. Also, we will remain alert about any potential visits by MEP’s for further advocacy.”

“ [with this training] I think we can access to EU and get minorities’ voices incorporated in EU funded projects.”

“The Training was useful to understand the various functions of the EU and its member Countries. It is very much important to engage with the EU at country level with concrete information and data of the issue we are dealing with, including the Dalit Human Right situation.

I will try to strengthen my coordination and liaising with EU Delegation office in Pakistan, highlight Dalits issues in future meetings with EU Delegation, MEPs and with the EU special representative for Human Rights.

Nepal: UN Poverty expert says caste discrimination is a root cause of poverty



The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, Olivier de Schutter, presented his [visit report](#) to Nepal to the UN Human Rights Council 50th Session in June 2022.

His visit was supported by IDSN and its national partners the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) and Dalit NGO Federation (DNF), whose staff met the Rapporteur in country and showed him the situation of Dalits on the ground.

During the Interactive Dialogue, Mr. de Schutter noted that “Discrimination is the single most important factor in explaining why Dalit people are disproportionately affected by poverty: around 42 per cent of Dalit live below the poverty line (43.6 per cent of Hill Dalit and 38.2 per cent of Terai Dalit), far above the national poverty rate of 25.2 per cent.”

“While the immediate causes of this gap are limited employment opportunities owing to occupation specialisation preventing Dalits from accessing well-paid jobs, as well as lack of access to (quality) education and land that perpetuates poverty from one generation of Dalit to the next, the persistence of social discrimination is the overarching factor explaining this situation,” Mr. de Schutter said.

Dalit activists and IDSN members participated in the Interactive Dialogue at the session. Forum Asia and FEDO delivered an oral [statement](#) noting the Rapporteur’s concerns on the continuing practice of debt bondage and bonded labour, which forms part of the discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes towards Dalit and indigenous communities.

The statement also highlighted the fact that the authorities had so far failed to enforce the Bonded Labour (Prohibition) Act 2002. The majority of persons suffering from this scourge are Dalits.

Moreover, the statement pointed out that lack of access to essential services and denial of basic safeguards against rights violations make it impossible for Dalits and other minority communities to break from intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion.

IDSN partner IMADR also delivered a strong oral [statement](#), focusing on the rights of Dalit women and girls, who are marginalised and overlooked in society.

The statement highlighted that Nepal, despite having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world on inclusivity, still faces enormous challenges with inclusion of the Dalit community, especially its women and girls who have long faced many problems including poverty, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, early marriage and violence.

IDSN reinforces the findings of Mr. Schutter’s report and the calls from its members and partners in Nepal to implement recommendations in good faith, and in close consultation with the Dalit community, in particular Dalit women.



Dalit boys playing football in Pakistan. Photo by Jakob Carlsen

Organisation and Networking

Engaging with the IDSN membership

IDSN members, associates and affiliates are key to all the work IDSN does and the activities and achievements in this report.

IDSN engages regularly with members when relevant opportunities arise for input, knowledge sharing or participation in events.

In February, IDSN also brought together Dalit Solidarity Networks from across Europe for a meeting in Copenhagen.

In March, the team also met with international associates in Geneva. Both meetings included discussions on continued collaboration and strategies going forward.

In addition to engaging with the current membership, IDSN continued its work expanding the IDSN membership with a special focus on new connections in Pakistan.

Nurturing new connections in Pakistan

IDSN made an effort in 2022 to focus on growing connections in Pakistan to provide input and deliberations on caste-related issues. IDSN had the pleasure of working actively with Pirbhu Lal Satyani from the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), to help map and foster new collaborations to expand and enhance network connections and input from Pakistan.

Several meetings were held between IDSN and prospective affiliates or other collaboration partners. IDSN also ensured that these new connections were invited to key webinars and other events. From the new insights and input gained, Mr. Satyani drafted several briefing notes on the situation of Dalit women and girls as well as on hate-speech, that helped inform submissions to the UN and EU throughout the year including the submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan. IDSN looks forward to continued engagement with new connections in Pakistan and will continue efforts in the coming year.

Expanding the network

IDSN continued its work to broaden and expand the network, focusing on specific areas of IDSN's work, where more expertise is needed and countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan where IDSN has fewer members and affiliates.

IDSN encouraged and received applications from several organisations in 2022 and three new affiliates were successfully adopted by the IDSN Board. IDSN is pleased to welcome Rights Education And Development Centre (READ) from India, Dalit Khulna from Bangladesh and the Dignity Initiatives from Nepal to the network.

READ is an NGO established in 2001, with a mission to address the challenges faced by Dalits and other marginalised communities. READ has been working for the past twenty-one years for Dalits rights and particularly Dalit women textile workers rights and thus brings important expertise on business and human rights to the network. READ has provided vocational skills and employability training to youths, worked on eradicating manual scavenging and ensured quality education for Dalits.

READ aims to increase global accountability by becoming a member of IDSN and contribute to IDSN's advocacy work on business and human rights. IDSN has already had good participation and engagement from READ in IDSN activities including at the UN Business and Human Rights Forum.

IDSN's second new affiliate, Dalit Khulna, is an NGO in Bangladesh that was established in 1998 with the aim of promoting fundamental human rights, socio-economic development and empowerment among marginalised communities.

Dalit Khulna also works towards eliminating caste-based discrimination. The organisation is primarily focused on the rights of marginalised groups in the South Western region of Bangladesh. Dalit Khulna has implemented several rights-based programmes to improve access to education, health, safe migration, vocational training, safe water and sanitation and has received good recognition for its work, including an award from the BBC World Challenge in 2006.

Dalit Khulna will contribute to IDSN with input and documentation on the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh and take part in IDSN advocacy initiatives where relevant.

IDSN's final new affiliate, The Dignity Initiative, is an NGO founded in 2015 by Dalit researchers, writers, academics and activists in Nepal. The organisation aims to produce knowledge through research, foster critical public discourse against caste discrimination, and challenge dominant narratives. The organisation's mission is to end all forms of caste-based discrimination and untouchability and ensure a dignified life for the Dalit community.

The Dignity Initiative's strategic objectives are to strengthen the Dalit movement through knowledge production, hold constructive discussions on Dalit issues, produce a critical mass to challenge discriminatory power relations and create wider collaboration and solidarity. The organisation runs several programmes, including a fully funded scholarship program for Dalit youth to study undergraduate law degree and a peer-reviewed Journal of Dalit Studies.

The organisation will contribute to IDSN's work with international human rights mechanisms and contribute with research expertise, and a highly skilled and diverse team of young scholars and activists.

International Associates Meeting

To strengthen network collaboration, IDSN facilitated a meeting with Geneva-based International Associates and other partners, to discuss joint strategies and synergies, regarding UN human rights advocacy.

At the meeting held in March, experience and ideas were shared and opportunities for collaboration and mutual support were explored. IDSN looks forward to pursuing our Geneva based advocacy with strengthened connections.



European Dalit Solidarity Networks had a coordination meeting in Copenhagen in 2022. Photo by: Iiris Kivimäki

Dalit Solidarity Networks meet to chart out strategies

IDSN was delighted to welcome representatives from Dalit Solidarity Networks in Germany, UK, Finland and Norway to Copenhagen for a two-day meeting from 8-9 February.

IDSN's International Associate, Arisa, from The Netherlands, also took part in the meeting and special guest, Priyadharsini Palani, from IDSN affiliate, The Blue Club, made an inspiring presentation on the organisation's work on amplifying the voices of Dalit women.

All the organisations participating gave presentations on their work, as did IDSN, to open up for exploring new synergies and avenues for enhanced collaboration.

Achievements and challenges were shared and new strategies discussed centred around IDSN's three core thematic priorities: Dalit women and gender justice; business and human rights; and equality and participation.

The meeting was a great catalyst for maintaining and creating

new opportunities and recharging the personal connections after a few years of virtual collaboration due to the pandemic.

Priyadharsini Palani's presentation on the future of Dalit women's representation in the media scape and the Blue Club's work on securing space for, and amplifying, the voices of Dalit women presented a good frame from which to look at IDSN's work with Dalit women and gender justice.

Ways forward within the United Nations and European Union political spheres were discussed, as was how to ensure that businesses are aware of their human rights obligations when it comes to caste discrimination. Experience, expertise and key learnings were shared and the new paths charted out reflected this.

Participants expressed leaving Copenhagen feeling re-energised to embark on the work to end caste discrimination in their respective settings and following up on the agreed plans.

Website, newsletter and social media

IDSN continued to engage with members, associates and affiliates as well as with the wider public, policy makers, academics and activists through all the IDSN communication channels such as the website, newsletters and social media.

The IDSN website serves the network as well as a broad global user base of activists, academics, policy and decision-makers, and continues to be the leading global resource on caste-based discrimination. In 2022, idsn.org had over 65,000 users and over 117,000 pageviews. Looking at user demographics, the number of users between 18-24 (as registered by analytics) rose to 40 per cent, reflecting well on IDSN's objectives of reaching young people. There were trackable visits from over 180 different countries and over 100 universities.

IDSN also posted over 124 new entries in the IDSN online documentation database on caste discrimination in 2022, where entries are cross-referenced and searchable according to theme, institution, country and year, as well as other relevant parameters.

Over twenty news articles were written and published on the IDSN website. The articles cover developments across all IDSN's thematic priorities at the UN and EU level as well as in countries affected by caste discrimination. They are based on IDSN's work and input from network members and associates. News from IDSN and the membership was also published in IDSN's regular newsletters. The newsletters have a varied readership from a wide range of countries. 2022 saw a 14 per cent increase in the amount of subscribers to the IDSN newsletter.

IDSN's social media channels continue to be an important part of IDSN's internal and external communications, with members and associates interacting regularly via social media and cross promoting news and documentation. Followers on IDSN's Twitter channel rose to 5508. The channel also had nearly 400,000 tweet impressions and 1200 retweets and 2000 likes.

On YouTube, views of IDSN's online video on Dalit women grew to a total of over 228,000 views and views of the IDSN intro video on caste discrimination passed 103,700 views. The original "I'm Dalit, How Are You?" video by IDSN reached 232,000 views.

In November, IDSN launched a new [LinkedIn](#) page that was made public in connection with the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights.

IDSN Publications

In March, IDSN published the Annual Report 2021-22 and distributed it widely in the network and beyond.

In October, a new IDSN introductory [leaflet](#) was also produced as were postcards with QR codes, as pictured above, that were used for UN and EU advocacy work.

Governance

While IDSN's work in 2022 continued to be centred around the IDSN 2018-2023 [strategy](#), the IDSN Secretariat and Board began work in 2022, to chart out the next five-year strategy that will govern IDSN's work from 2024.

IDSN Governance adhered to the IDSN statutes and the IDSN Board held two virtual meetings in addition to one in-person meeting in Copenhagen, where new network affiliates were adopted and first discussions of the coming strategy were initiated.

The gender composition of IDSN's board, as of 31 December 2022, is five women and four men. There are three board members from India, two from Nepal, one from Pakistan, one from Japan, one from Germany and one from Norway.

Secretariat

The IDSN Secretariat team are based across Europe and work together remotely as well as at the Secretariat headquarters in Copenhagen.

IDSN Secretariat staff as of 31 December 2022:

- Executive Director
Meena Varma
- Head of Communications
Maria Brink Schleimann
- Programme and Finance Officer
Madeleine Cowper
- UN Advocacy Adviser
Paulo Lugon Arantes
- EU Advocacy Adviser
Emma Achilli
- Bookkeeper
Peter Soby Petersen

Aside from the Programme and Finance Officer, the rest of the Secretariat staff and advisers work part-time.

UN Consultative Status

IDSN granted ECOSOC status

Following a historic [vote](#) at the UN, IDSN was finally granted UN ECOSOC consultative status after fighting for 15 years for it.

After having been repeatedly deferred due to silencing in the form of arbitrary questioning in the smaller UN NGO Committee, IDSN, alongside eight other NGOs, was brought to a vote on 7 December in the UN ECOSOC Committee, and granted ECOSOC status.

On a practical as well as a symbolic level, this is a very important milestone for IDSN and a testament to never giving up. With the accreditation now in place, IDSN can look forward to giving statements in its own name, hosting side-events and accrediting our delegates.

We would like to thank all those who have bravely spoken out on our behalf throughout the years, including UN experts and officials, EU MEPs and officials and human rights defenders. We would like to thank the IDSN International Associates who have supported us in accessing the UN human rights spaces in the last 15 years, while our accreditation was withheld. Finally, our deepest gratitude goes to the International Service on Human Rights (ISHR), that has supported us in this process for so many years and never gave up on fighting our corner.

Finances and funding

We would like to thank the following for their generous contribution to IDSN in 2022: the Norwegian Human Rights Foundation, Bread for the World (Germany) and those who made individual private donations through PayPal and Candid. IDSN continued fundraising efforts in 2022 in order to ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of the organisation.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2022

Profit and loss

	2022 DKK	2022 EURO	2021 DKK
Opening balance¹	463,810.46	62,125.52	791,451.48
Income			
Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF)	826,234.44	112,010.19	667,895.31
Brot für die Welt	1,156,840.02	156,000.00	1,254,575.10
Other income	21,803.56	2,920.50	59,966.54
Brot für die Welt paid 2021	96,501.60	13,000.00	
NHRF paid 2021	418,104.69	56,003.41	
Total	2,529,484.31	338,814.08	1,982,436.95
Expenditure	2,561,838.24	343,149.10	2,310,077.97
Result	-32,363.93	-4,335.02	-327,641.02
Balance	431,446.53	57,790.50	463,810.46

Balance statement

	2022 DKK	2022 EURO	2021 DKK
Assets			
Cash at bank at 31.12.	542,631.68	72,683.30	1,051,282.68
Other assets			
Rent deposit	13,326.00	1,784.96	13,326.00
Petty cash	5,004.73	670.36	1,649.32
Outstanding accounts	4,775.74	639.69	74,417.10
Total other assets	23,106.47	3,095.02	89,392.42
Liabilities			
Balance Master Card account	0.00	0.00	-1,134.10
Compulsory holiday payment fund	-5,920.31	-793.00	-5,512.85
Outstanding Accounts ²	-128,371.31	-17,194.81	-155,611.40
BfdW funds for 2022			-96,501.60
NHRF fund for 2022			-418,104.69
Total Liabilities	-134,291.62	-17,987.81	-676,864.64
Balance carried forward	431,446.53	57,790.50	463,810.46

The financial statements are presented in Danish kroner.

For reasons of comparison, amounts in Euro are presented, using a fixed exchange rate based on a monthly average from Infocore: 7,4657

Hence, some discrepancies may appear compared to actual amounts received in Euro.

Notes:

1 Opening balance is in accordance with accounts for 2021

2 Consist of audit, annual report, insurance, tax for 2022 to be paid in 2023



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Connect with IDSN on social

-  twitter.com/idsnupdates
-  linkedin.com/company/idsn
-  facebook.com/dalitnetwork
-  youtube.com/idsnvideo

Members

Nepal

- Dalit NGO Federation
- Feminist Dalit Organization
- Jagaran Media Center
- Nepal Dalit National Social Welfare Organisation
- Samata Foundation

Pakistan

- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network

Bangladesh

- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement

Sri Lanka

- Human Development Organization

India

- Navsarjan Trust
- National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
- National Federation of Dalit Women
- People's Watch

Solidarity Networks - Europe

- Dalit Solidarity Network – UK
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Norway
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Finland
- Dalit Solidarität Deutschland (Germany)

Affiliates

- Association For Dalit Women's Advancement of Nepal
- Center for Law & Justice - Pakistan
- Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources - Nepal
- Dalit Welfare Organisation - Nepal
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies – Sri Lanka
- National Dalit Christian Watch - India
- Parittran - Bangladesh
- Social Awareness Society for Youths - India
- The Blue Club - India
- READ – the Rights Education & Development Centre- India
- Dignity Initiative - Nepal
- Dalit Khulna - Bangladesh

International Associates

- Advocating Rights In South Asia
- Anti-Slavery International
- Asian Centre for Human Rights
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
- Asian Human Rights Commission
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
- Franciscans International
- Human Rights Watch
- ICMICA/Pax Romana
- International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination
- Lutheran World Federation
- Minority Rights Group International
- Robert Kennedy Memorial Foundation, USA
- The Rafto Foundation
- World Council of Churches



IDSN was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSN is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit Solidarity Networks from Europe and organisations in caste-affected countries. IDSN engages with the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral institutions, working for action-oriented approaches to address 'untouchability' and other human rights abuses against Dalits and similar communities that suffer discrimination based on work and descent. IDSN bases its work on contributions from members, associates and affiliates. The network produces crucial input in the form of documentation, strategic interventions and lobby action and also supports national-level lobbying.