

Statement from the INTERNATIONAL DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK

To the participants in the EU-INDIA Summit, 23 November 2001:

SEEK COOPERATION TO ERADICATE CASTE DISCRIMINATION

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) is deeply disappointed that governments attending the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban failed to address the issue of caste discrimination and related forms of discrimination based on work and descent. This form of discrimination affects the lives of an estimated 250 million Dalits in South Asia, as well as 3 million Burakumin in Japan and an unknown number in parts of Africa.

Dalit representatives from India and representatives of affected peoples from several other countries deeply impressed the participants at the WCAR and at the preceding NGO Forum with their testimonies of systematic discrimination and oppression, and with the similarity of their experiences in different national contexts. Nevertheless the government of India vigorously opposed even the very circumspect language of paragraph 73 of the draft Programme of Action, calling for measures against discrimination on the basis of work and descent. To our surprise and dismay, the European Union did not express clear and timely support for this paragraph.

However, the IDSN strongly welcomes the concern that, among others, the National Human Rights Commission of India, the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have shown for the large number of people who suffer discrimination because of their low-caste status. The National Human Rights Commission of India has recognized the "manifest inadequacies" in implementation of the relevant laws protecting and promoting the rights of Dalits, and has encouraged exchange of views on these matters in India and at the international level. The European Parliament, in its Human Rights Report adopted on 5 July 2001, urged the EU and its member states to "voice its concern regarding caste discrimination and to formulate strategies to counter this widespread practice [of untouchability]". It also called upon the EU to "investigate to what extent its policies contribute to the abolition of caste-discrimination and the practice of untouchability in India".

The IDSN strongly urges India and the European Union to ensure that human rights in general and in particular caste discrimination in India and racial discrimination in the EU, are discussed at the EU-India Summit to be held in New Delhi on 23 November 2001. This would be in line with the EU Human Rights Policy adopted in May 2001 and also a logical consequence of the agreement reached at the EU-India Summit in Lisbon last year, where India and the EU promised to "coordinate efforts to promote and protect human rights". Dealing constructively and cooperatively with discrimination in all its forms in particular would go far in promoting human rights in two of the the world's largest democracies.

The areas to be addressed with regard to the position of Dalits and other minorities should include systematic acts of violence, the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, wages and working conditions (including bonded labour), primary education and child labour, equal opportunities for women, land reform, and the abolition of the practice of manual scavenging. We also urge India and the EU to discuss how these issues can be tackled in the framework of their cooperation in the fields of development and economic relations.

Finally the IDSN proposes that the realization of human rights, including eradicating discrimination against Dalits and other minorities, be a permanent agenda item at the EU-India Summits.

October 2001

International Dalit Solidarity Network, including among others:

Anti-Slavery International
Dalit Solidarity Network - UK
Danchurchaid - Denmark
Human Rights Watch
India Committee of the Netherlands
The Lutheran World Federation
Platform Dalit Solidarity Germany/Bread for the World