



International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION



2016  
annual report







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Cover: This young Dalit woman in India is forced to conduct manual scavenging, a caste-based practice where human waste is removed from dry latrines manually.  
Photo by Jakob Carlsen

Left: In Nepal Dalit women are often forced into caste-based prostitution because they belong to the Badi caste. This Dalit woman can find no alternative ways to support herself and her family.  
Photo by: Jakob Carlsen

**2016**  
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## Word from the Chair

Welcome to the 2016 Annual Report of the International Dalit Solidarity Network. As ever you will see from this report, this has been a year of many highlights – have a look at our highlights boxes on the relevant pages. However, there are still ongoing challenges facing us as a Network – and our members across the world. Last year this report was disseminated to more than 800 recipients and continues to be one of the most praised and informative reports for all those who receive it.

One of the key highlights this year was the publication of the ground breaking report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, covering the phenomenon of caste-based discrimination around the world. The report was supported by a number of states at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council in March 2016. See the Special Feature section on Page 7.

I would like to add here our special and heartfelt thanks to Rita Izsák-Ndiaye who steps down from her mandate in July 2017. We wish her all the very best and can only hope that her successor will continue her great work and urge states to address the issue of caste-based discrimination.

Caste discrimination remains one of the biggest human rights abuses existing today, which involves the abhorrent practice of untouchability and descent-based social and economic inequality. Caste discrimination still goes unchallenged and often unacknowledged. But the tireless work of activists and supporters continues to raise awareness of this issue.

We are a unique organisation, aiming to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We are making a difference and we add a significant voice to a growing global human rights movement campaigning for change on caste-based discrimination. Great inroads have been made at the UN and EU levels – with international institutions recognising the need to address caste-based discrimination as a fundamental human and labour rights issue.

We are very proud of what we have achieved this year, as highlighted in this report, but we have ongoing challenges – not least one of political will. Our members in caste-affected countries report on highlights and challenges on pages 16 to 29.

The report also offers a brief overview of the work carried out by Solidarity Networks in Europe. From lobbying their relevant Ministries to raising the issue to businesses and multi-national corporations. Under-resourced and with many working purely on a voluntary basis, they are a perfect example of what passion and commitment to the cause can achieve.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Dalit Network members, Dalit Solidarity Networks, our International Associates and our donors. Without them these achievements would not be possible.

### Highlights in 2016

- Thematic Report on caste-based discrimination by UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.
- Caste mainstreamed in EP Resolution on the Annual Report on Human Rights.
- High level UN and EU officials speak out on caste.
- OHCHR organises Human Rights Council side-event on caste discrimination.
- UN Expert speaks out at the UN Human Rights Council on IDSN ECOSOC application.
- EIDHR Global Call for the rights of persons affected by caste-based discrimination.
- India - Una case raised by European Parliament and UN Special Procedures.
- Eight Special Procedures mandate holders mentioned caste in their reports.
- Six countries received recommendations to address caste from UN Treaty Bodies
- Asia Dalit Rights Forum co-hosts meeting of 32 parliamentarians from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal with the Asian Parliamentarians Forum for Dalit Rights Concerns.
- First IDSN General Assembly held in Geneva - members met top level UN officials

Special thanks to the Board members of IDSN, who give so much of their time and energy – and have the passion and commitment to ensure a vibrant and thriving organisation.

I also praise the whole staff team at IDSN. They have been hardworking, skilled and excellent at what they do. This year we have been supported by Maria and Kim in Communications; Nina and Danni in International Advocacy; and Karen and Peter in ensuring good Financial Management. Of course, we do not forget the immense contribution of Rikke Nohrlind, Coordinator and Executive Director of IDSN since 2003 – our tribute to her is on the next page. Her drive and passion will be much missed!

We will continue to update you on our progress – both our successes and challenges. We do hope you will be able to continue to support us in the years to come as we fight for a caste free world.

**Meena Varma**  
Chair of the Board



## Tribute to Rikke Nöhrind



Many of Rikke Nöhrind's friends and family – including most of her current and former team – gathered in Copenhagen on Monday 24 October 2016 to celebrate the many achievements of IDS's outgoing Executive Director.

The Board of IDS, many of whom were present, were delighted to host a reception to say thank you and bid a fond farewell and good luck to Rikke who has been at the helm of the International Dalit Solidarity Network since 2003.

Under her leadership, the organisation has gone from strength to strength – with major inroads having been made at the UN and EU levels. After much consideration, Rikke decided that it was time for her to step aside from the organisation – and for her personally to go on to new adventures and interests.

One of Rikke's many key achievements has been the cooperation she has successfully negotiated with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and their support for the cause of addressing caste discrimination.

She is indomitable and her persistence, pressure and skill has really paid off. This is also evident with the major steps forward taken at the European Union, at all levels from the European Parliament to the Development Committee and various EU institutions.

I am sure you will all join me and the Board in expressing our immense gratitude and huge respect to Rikke for what she has achieved and given to this just cause.

### Caste discrimination

There are an estimated 260 million Dalits worldwide, often born into an 'untouchable' status, in highly stratified caste systems. Caste systems are found in South Asia, in communities migrated from South Asia across the globe and in other caste-stratified countries in Africa and Asia.

Caste-based discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Caste systems divide people into unequal and hierarchical social groups. Those at the bottom are

considered inferior, 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups. Those in the lowest of castes, known as Dalits in South Asia, are often considered 'untouchable' and subjected to so-called 'untouchability practices' in both public and private spheres. Dalits may be forced to do the most dirty and hazardous jobs, and subjected to modern slavery. Due to exclusion practiced by both state and non-state actors, Dalits have limited access to resources, services and development, keeping many in severe poverty.

Dalits are often de facto excluded from decision-making and meaningful participation in public and civil life. Lack of special legislation banning caste-based discrimination or lack of implementation of legislation, due to dysfunctional systems of justice, lack of state responsibility and caste-bias, have largely left Dalits without protection.

Despite policy development and new legislation in some countries, fundamental challenges still remain in all caste-affected countries.



## United Nations

In 2016, IDSN continued its close collaboration with members on preparing inputs for human rights mechanisms and participating in relevant UN events.

Dalit rights activists around the world observed the results of many years of advocacy efforts and sharing of country specific and thematic information on caste-based discrimination. Caste discrimination was addressed by several UN experts and by a number of human rights treaty bodies in relation to various thematic human rights issues. The Committees on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, all made recommendations to improve existing legal frameworks to combat caste discrimination for affected countries in Asia, Africa and Europe to meet their international obligations.

One of the absolute highlights from 2016, was the ground-breaking report published by the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues on "Minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status". The report stood as a clear outcome of many years of advocacy efforts, pushing for the UN to acknowledge discrimination based on work and descent (i.e. caste-based discrimination) as a serious and cross-cutting human rights issue affecting millions of people in different regions of the world.

### High Level Statements

In 2016, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, continued to highlight caste as a human rights concern on par with other forms of discrimination. In the [foreword](#) for the Annual Report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein noted caste-based discrimination as one of the key human rights gaps in need of more monitoring reporting and in-depth investigation by the OHCHR.

In a [statement](#) for the 31st session of the Human Rights Council in March, the High Commissioner stated that caste discrimination still stands as a root cause of human rights violations in Nepal ten years after the end of the internal armed conflict.

In May, the High Commissioner proceeded to mention caste during his visit to the Brookings Institute in Washington, where he spoke of equality and justice as essential components for the construction of a peaceful world. A sentiment he repeated in the opening [statement](#) for the Human Rights Council's 32nd regular session in June.

### UN Highlights in 2016

- **Special Rapporteur on minority issues published a ground breaking report covering the phenomenon of caste-based discrimination around the world.**
- **Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association called attention to the IDSN case at the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council and in his communication to the General Assembly.**
- **Special Rapporteur on slavery published a report on bonded labour, demonstrating the link between caste discrimination and bonded labour practices in a number of countries around the world.**
- **Special Rapporteur on Housing's visit to India highlighted the need to address caste discrimination.**
- **The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein mentioned caste discrimination in a number of statements and commented on the situation in Nepal.**

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**"Every individual must be clear in the knowledge that regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, opinions, belief, caste, age or sexual orientation, her equal rights are fully acknowledged."** UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, [statement](#)

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Furthermore, in the 33rd Council session, the High Commissioner presented a [report](#) on the human rights situation in Yemen wherein he drew attention to the Muhamasheen community and their vulnerable position in the country's ongoing conflict.

In connection with the IDSN General Assembly meeting in Geneva, the IDSN delegation also met with UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore. During the [meeting](#), Dalit leaders gave testimonies about the situation in their respective countries. Among them was Manjula Pradeep, Executive Director of the Indian human rights NGO, Navsarjan, who outlined a number of key issues in the struggle for Dalit rights. These include a high level of violence against Dalits, the ensuing impunity for human rights violations against them, multiple forms of discrimination against Dalit women and limited access for Dalits to resources, development, health and education.



**Special Feature**

## UN Expert's groundbreaking global report on caste discrimination



**"The issue of caste discrimination has touched me since the beginning of my mandate. It is unacceptable that 260 million people are considered inferior. This cannot be tolerated."**

Special Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsák-Ndiaye commenting on the report at a side-event on 'Minorities and caste-based discrimination' at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

UN Photo/ Jean-Marc Ferré

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, published the report 'Minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status', covering the phenomenon of caste-based discrimination around the world. The report was supported by a number of states at the 31st session Human Rights Council, where it was presented. Ms. Izsák-Ndiaye urged caste-affected countries to take urgent action to combat caste discrimination.

In the report the Special Rapporteur includes a number of recommendations to caste-affected states. She urges them to adopt legislation against caste discrimination; implement existing legal frameworks; conduct awareness-raising campaigns; and urgently develop comprehensive national action plans and budgets to combat caste discrimination.

The Special Rapporteur also notes that "women and girls are particularly vulnerable to caste discrimination, as they suffer from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination owing to both their gender and unprivileged caste status." Therefore, caste-affected states should take "robust action to eradicate such violations." They should also promote the UN guidelines to eliminate caste discrimination – as should the UN Human Rights Council.

According to the report, caste discrimination is so embedded in interpersonal and communal relationships that overcoming it will "require not only legal and political responses, but also community-based approaches aimed at changing the mindsets of individuals and the collective conscience of local communities." The report offers a thorough and systematic analysis of discrimination based on caste and analogous systems, describing it as a global phenomenon and a serious human rights violation infringing upon the basic principles of universal human dignity and equality. It stresses that caste-affected groups suffer extreme exclusion and dehumanization and are often deprived of their most basic rights. Moreover, caste discrimination perpetuates poverty in affected communities.

The report includes definitions and characteristics of caste discrimination, a global overview of caste-affected groups and a review of the international legal framework recognising caste discrimination as a human rights violation. It identifies areas of particular concern such as the right to life; access to justice; political participation; freedom of religion; the right to work; contemporary forms of slavery; the right to housing, water and sanitation, health and education; and humanitarian assistance. On a positive note, the Special Rapporteur also outlines initiatives and good practices addressing caste discrimination – in the UN system, national legislation and government institutions, and civil society.



This Dalit man works in debt bondage in Nepal. In 2016, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Urmila Bhoola, presented her report on “Debt bondage” to the Human Rights Council, finding this type of modern slavery to be a prevalent issue in a number of caste-affected countries including India, Pakistan and Nepal, where the vast majority of bonded laborers are from minority groups such as Dalits. Photo by: Jakob Carlsen.

## UN report on caste discrimination

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, published a ground breaking [report](#) covering caste-based discrimination around the world (see box on the previous page). The report was supported by a number of states at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council.

**“I hope that my report will be used as an advocacy tool in supporting the efforts of caste-affected communities and others who are tirelessly working to relegate caste discrimination to history.”** Special

Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsák-Ndiaye’s opening [statement](#) HRC 31

The UN report is the first of its kind, focusing on caste-systems in relation to minority issues and documenting the global nature of caste-based discrimination, drawing on cases from South Asia, different parts of Africa, Middle East and Europe, and serves as a great tool for international advocacy.

Ahead of the session IDSN and Human Rights Watch submitted a written [statement](#) with recommendations for states and UN agencies. During the event itself Minority Rights Group (MRG) delivered an oral [statement](#) on behalf of IDSN, MRG and the International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) and engaged in a number of meetings with state delegates and UN officials, including the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. IDSN also issued a [news story](#) on the release.

Inspired by the report on minorities and discrimination based on caste the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights hosted a side event under the same theme in Geneva on 16 March. The global nature of the issue was demonstrated by the selection of panelists at the event – apart from the Special Rapporteur herself, there were speakers from Nepal, Mauritania and the UK, and an expert on Yemen. IDSN issued a [report](#) on this event.

## UN Special Procedures

Throughout the year IDSN continued providing information and upholding a close dialogue with UN Special Procedures mandate holders, working under the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, by sharing information in consultations and meetings, submitting written input ahead of country visits and responding to questionnaires

## Forum on Minority Issues

### Caste discrimination in disaster relief highlighted at the UN

Speaking at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in November 2016 IDSN members delivered statements on how to consider caste in disaster response and recovery at the National level.

“South Asia region is one of the most disaster prone regions in the world, with over 215 million Dalits living there who are structurally discriminated and excluded in all aspects including the response, aid and rehabilitation process following humanitarian crisis,” said Deepak Nikarthal from the NCDHR, also representing ADRF and IDSN.

Bhakta Bishwakarma from the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO) also spoke saying, “Disaster policies and programs have not been inclusive and sensitive enough towards the most marginalized - Dalit, women, children, people with disabilities, senior citizens etc. Despite a number of intervention by the government, the tangible changes have not been seen even after one and half year of the devastation. People are still waiting for sustainable recovery.”

for thematic reports. Furthermore, IDSN submitted a list of points for consideration for the Annual Meeting of Special Procedures, encouraging mandate holders to note recent UN initiatives addressing caste-based discrimination, and consider a joint initiative to address the issue.

After the Special Rapporteur on minority issues published her report on caste, IDSN and its members worked to utilise her recommendations and share the findings of her report. The report was presented to the Human Rights Council in March and has inspired a number of other mandates within the Special Procedures branch to consider caste in their submissions. The Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice included a direct reference to the report in their report on health and safety to the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council as did the Special Rapporteur on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.



In June, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Urmila Bhoola, presented her [report](#) on “Debt bondage” to the Human Rights Council. IDSN contributed to the report by submitting comprehensive written input with contributions from members in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Dalit Solidarity Networks in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In addition, DSN-UK collaborated with the Tamil Nadu based organisation Read on a [written submission](#) on Sumangali debt bondage schemes in India.

The final report presented debt bondage as a prevalent issue in a number of caste-affected countries including India, Pakistan and Nepal in various industries from textile mills to mining, construction and agriculture, where the vast majority of bonded laborers are from minority groups such as scheduled castes and Dalits.

Following the release of her report the Rapporteur made a [video statement](#) wherein she mentioned how caste affected groups along with other marginalised groups are disproportionately exposed to debt bondage schemes.

In April, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Lailani Farah, went on a country visit to India. Following her visit the UN expert [stated](#) that India needs legislation to combat all forms of housing discrimination against any individual or groups, and expressed concern about the continued discrimination against Dalits, affecting their access to housing.

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues went on a visit to Sri Lanka in October. In her end of mission [statement](#) she

urged the government to take concrete steps to protect Sri Lanka’s minorities. She noted that there were “remaining challenges” within Tamil and Muslim communities, including return of occupied land, missing persons, demilitarisation, release of security-related detainees, poverty, violence and discrimination against women, and caste-based discrimination.

In May, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights conducted a country visit to Mauritania and [reported](#) on continued caste-based exclusion of the Haratine community, from economic and social life.

In collaboration with Navsarjan Trust and People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), IDSN submitted a letter of concern to the Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, contemporary forms of racism and on torture and other cruel and inhumane or degrading treatment and punishment. The letter raised recent cases of violence against Dalits in Una, Gujarat. The case is explained in detail in the India chapter of this report. The letter contained recommendations for the Rapporteurs to take steps to address the case with the Government of India.

In total eight mandate holders addressed the issue of caste-based discrimination in their reports in 2016.

### Forum on Minority Issues

The 9th session of the Forum on Minority Issues took place in November 2016, under the theme “Minorities in situations of humanitarian crisis”.



## Ambedkar & UN

### Ambedkar commemorated at UN event

**Prominent UN officials participated in a UN event in April to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of India's first minister of law, father of the Indian constitution and prominent Dalit rights activist, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The event, hosted by the Permanent Mission of India, was held in New York.**

**United Nations Development Programme Administrator and Chair of the United Nations Development Group, Helen Clarke, delivered a key note speech commemorating the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar. She stated that the visions and ideals of Dr. Ambedkar are as relevant today as when the Indian constitution was signed into law, noting that, "Reducing discrimination and exclusion in all its forms is at the very heart of the new Global Development Goals."**

**The event was marked by a number of Indian embassies around the world including the UK, Denmark, Guatemala, Indonesia and Kenya.**

The thematic focus of the forum was inspired by the Rapporteurs latest report to the General Assembly, the theme of which she announced at the OHCHR sponsored side-event on minorities and caste discrimination for the 31st Human Rights Council session. The side-event included presentations on the obstacles caste-affected groups are experiencing in connection with humanitarian relief in Nepal and Yemen, where people who are considered to belong to "lower castes" are denied access to humanitarian aid. The report was released in August and contained information on Dalits in South Asia and the Muhamesheen community in Yemen, who are generally more exposed to war and disaster and are less likely to receive humanitarian aid.

IDSN members Deepak Nikarthal, from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Bhakta Bishwakarma from Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation and Pribhu Lal Satyani from the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, all delivered [statements](#) with inputs for the draft recommendations on how to consider caste in disaster response and recovery at the national level.

### Treaty Bodies

Senegal, Pakistan, Nepal, UK, Bangladesh, Japan all received recommendations to address caste based discrimination from UN Treaty Bodies in 2016.

In January, the Committee on the Rights of the Child made

[recommendations](#) to Senegal to adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate discrimination against all groups including children belonging to lower castes. In June 2016, the Committee reviewed Nepal and recommended the State Party to conduct an evaluation of their National Plan of Action for Children with special attention to the children in vulnerable situations, including Dalits.

The United Kingdom and Pakistan were reviewed by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination during its 90th session in August. Prior to both reviews joint submissions were made to the Committee.

IDSN and the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network submitted joint input for the list of themes and an alternative [report](#) on caste discrimination in Pakistan highlighting the need for disaggregated data, as well as the issue of forced marriage and bonded labour affecting scheduled castes in Pakistan. The Committee addressed all the issues in their [concluding observations](#) and made strong recommendations, recalling the General Recommendation 29 on discrimination based on work and descent and urged Pakistan to take immediate action to end forced conversion and forced marriage of Dalit women, and to prosecute and punish the abductors with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime. The Committee further requested the State party to include information on the situation of Dalits in the country, including relevant statistical data, in its next periodic report.

IDSN and DSN-UK also jointly issued an alternative [report](#) recommending the UK Government to activate the caste clause in the 2010 Equality Act and to formulate a national strategy to eliminate discrimination against descent-based groups in accordance with the CERD General Recommendation 29. In their [concluding observations](#), the Committee expressed concern that several provisions of the Equality Act 2010 had not been brought into legal effect, including the clause on caste-based discrimination. They also recommended the State Party to invoke this clause, prohibiting caste discrimination by law, and ensure access to effective remedies for victims of caste discrimination.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Girls (CEDAW) examined Japan's record on women's rights during its 63rd session in February. The [concluding observations](#) included a number of observations about caste discrimination against Buraku women in Japan and highlighted low literacy levels, discrimination in the employment sector and underrepresentation of Buraku women in decision making positions. The Committee expressed its concern over the continued discrimination of this group and called on the Government to vigorously pursue efforts aimed at eliminating multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by ethnic minority women including Buraku women.

An IDS-N team participated in the 65th session of the Committee on Discrimination Against Women in November, for the examination of Bangladesh and their adherence to their obligations to protect women from discrimination.

IDS-N and BDERM submitted a joint [alternative report](#) to the Committee ahead of the review and the IDS-N team participated in an informal consultation in November. Afsana Amin (BDERM) gave an [oral statement](#) to Committee members on discrimination against Dalit women in Bangladesh, emphasising the need to accelerate the enactment of the proposed Anti-discrimination Act, collect disaggregated data on gender and caste, prioritise political participation and ensure access to health for Dalit Women.

During the constructive dialogue with the Bangladesh state delegation the Committee posed a number of questions on Dalit women, demanding a concrete timeline for passing the Anti-Discrimination law to protect the rights of Dalits. Caste was mentioned in the [Concluding Observations](#), which noted the lacking implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Bill and expressed concern over discrimination against Dalit women in the form of abductions, sexual harassment, rape, and lack of access to public services and resources. The Committee recommended that Bangladesh collect data disaggregated by caste in all areas under the convention.

In November, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination held a consultation with Civil Society. The purpose of the consultation was to explore new ways for the Committee to engage with Civil Society Organisations and collaborate to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. In collaboration with DSN-UK and Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization, IDS-N jointly prepared a [written response](#) focusing on caste discrimination for the examination of Nepal and United Kingdom.

The issue of caste discrimination was raised by the panelists including Committee members. Chairperson Anastacia Crickley and Claire Thomas from Minority Rights Group noted the challenges in addressing discrimination against Dalits in relation to the Sustainable Development Agenda. Deepak Nikarhil from the National Campaign on Human Rights, delivered a statement on the global nature of caste-based discrimination. While acknowledging the importance of CERD General Recommendation 29, Nikarhil called for a greater recognition of caste as an important component in racial discrimination around the world. In response to the question - "how can CERD improve collaboration with civil society", Bhakta Bishwakarma from the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO) said that the Government's failure to deliver a state report is a barrier for collaboration between the Committee and Civil Society.

## Sustainable Development Goals

Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the process of formulating indicators to measure the implementation of the SDGs over the next 15 years was continued by the Inter Agency Group of Experts. Although the Development Goals are focused on reducing inequality and eliminating discriminatory practices, the targets and international indicators fail to address or mention discrimination based on work and descent. In her thematic report on discrimination based on caste the Special Rapporteur on minority issues also recommended states to include caste specific indicators in their implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Caste systems and discrimination based on caste is a global issue and a root cause for many of the goals and challenges that the international community has agreed to eliminate by 2030. IDS-N and its members will continue to campaign for caste to be considered in the implementation of the UN Goals.

IDS-N submitted input for a [paper](#) published by the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) on "Human Rights in the Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Section 4.3 of the paper on "Measuring discrimination" refers to the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, encouraging states to consider including caste-specific indicators.

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**"Development of specific indicators and data collection initiatives should be considered when defining additional national indicators and approaches to supplement the global [Sustainable Development] framework. Such an approach could imply, for example, the development of indicators to address caste-based discrimination."** Danish Institute for Human Rights on "Human Rights in the Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"

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IDS-N produced a [brief](#) with recommendations for the implementation of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was shared with relevant stakeholders during the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council and in connection with the Annual full day thematic discussion on the human rights of women.

In the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development in July, the President of the 10th cycle of the UN Human Rights Council, Choi Kyonglim, included concerns regarding caste discrimination in his inputs to the Forum which follows up the 2030 agenda. By doing so, the President recommended governments around the world to include caste issues in their work to implement



Cows were at the centre of a case of atrocities against Dalits taken up by the European Parliament in 2016. The case covered an incident in Una, Gujarat where a group of Dalits were beaten and publicly humiliated by dominant caste 'cow vigilantes' for skinning a dead cow. Photo by Jakob Carlsen

the Sustainable Development Goals. Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) chair Paul Divakar, and co-chair Durga Sob, spoke on the panel at the UN High Level Political Forum official side event 'Leave No One Behind: Ensuring Inclusion of the most marginalised and socially excluded communities in SDGs'. The event was not organised by IDSN but brought important attention to the need for SDG indicators to address caste-based discrimination specifically.

IDSN and the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) also issued a joint [press release](#) in connection with the 4th Global Women Deliver Conference held in Copenhagen in May, calling on participants to address discrimination against caste affected groups and indigenous people. In relation to the implementation of the SDGs, IDSN noted that Dalit and indigenous women often face limited or no access to health care due to poverty and discrimination which also affected their access to education and other key areas of the 2030 Development Agenda.

## ECOSOC Application

The Committee on NGOs once again posed questions to IDSN, thereby deferring the IDSN application for consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the 9th year in a row. This makes it the longest pending application before the Committee. Ahead of the Committee session in June, IDSN participated in a [joint call](#) by 230 NGOs, led by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), expressing concern about the long-term practice of some States to block UN accreditation for NGOs. Now former IDSN Executive Director, Rikke Nöhrli, was cited in an ISHR [press statement](#) wherein she noted the importance of NGOs being granted access to participate in UN discussions.

The Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Maina Kiai, mentioned the IDSN case in a [commentary](#) on the closing civic space reflected in the work of the UN Committee on NGOs. The Rapporteur commented on the tendency by some governments to block civil society interaction with UN bodies and mechanisms and highlighted the IDSN case as being "especially troubling".

The Rapporteur proceeded to raise the IDSN case following his presentation to the Human Rights Council and interactive debate with states at the 32nd Council session, where he stated that the procedure of repeating questions was used to "thwart IDSN from getting consultative status". The Special Rapporteur also mentioned the IDSN case in his annual thematic [report](#) to the Human Rights Council. The report described caste-based systems in South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region as "illustrative of cultural fundamentalism that violates the rights of those considered to be of inferior status". The IDSN case was highlighted in relation to restrictions put on Dalit activists at the multilateral level, where India is blocking accreditation.

## European Union

In 2016, IDSN continued to make inputs for and participate in meetings with EU institutions including representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS), European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and Members of the European Parliament (EP). Throughout the year, caste discrimination was featured in important EU initiatives and resolutions.

IDSN recommendations on relevant Interactive Dialogues at UN Human Rights Council sessions and the report by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues were shared broadly following the 31st regular session of the UN Human Rights Council. IDSN also shared its Alternative Report for the review of Bangladesh by the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), met on several occasions with MEPs to lobby and discuss ways forward for the above initiatives and shared substantive updates and briefings with a number of MEPs including information on recent attacks on young Dalits in Gujarat, India, in an effort to streamline caste into EU policies.

In June, a cross party group of 22 members of the European Parliament submitted a [letter](#) to the High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, calling on the European Union to step up their efforts to address caste discrimination at the multilateral level and in their dialogue with caste-affected states. The letter contains a number of recommendations, including the development and implementation of EU guidance on caste discrimination. It also urges the High Representative to take note of the upcoming UN Guidance Tool on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent and calls on the EU to "use every opportunity to express its grave concern over caste discrimination and seek to support states' implementation of these UN recommendations."

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**"At a time when the space for civil society is shrinking in many countries, it is crucial that the EU acts to promote human rights. There are so many areas where the EU can make a huge difference to millions of people affected by caste discrimination, including political and human rights dialogues, development assistance and humanitarian aid."**

Louis Michel, Member of the European Parliament

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**"We are convinced that the EU could and should do a lot more to address caste discrimination in words as well as in action, and we urge the High Representative to be at the forefront of EU efforts to eradicate it."**

Heidi Hautala, Member of the European Parliament

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Mogherini responded to the letter positively, though her [response](#) did not provide a clear reply as to how the EU is going to actively ensure visibility of caste discrimination in its human rights agenda.

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**“The Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies now take into account discrimination based on caste. The EU pays particular attention to discrimination based on caste in the analysis of the human rights situations in individual partner countries. These analyses also take into account the complexities of multiple or intersectional discrimination and are essential to the human rights and policy dialogues conducted with our partner countries, as well as in identifying and implementing our cooperation activities.”**

Frederica Mogherini, High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission

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On several occasions throughout the year, IDSN participated in EU human rights or civil society events, and set up meetings with MEPs and EU officials, and Dalit human rights activists.

Caste discrimination was raised in several discussion fora at the EU-Civil Society Conference in Brussels in March, attended by more than 800 participants. IDSN board member, Henri Tiphagne, Director of Peoples

Watch-India, addressed the audience at the closing session with a strongly worded statement on the rapidly shrinking democratic space in India and ingrained caste discrimination. He challenged the EU to support human rights defenders more effectively and advance its policy dialogue with India.

Caste was noted in connection with the challenges faced by the world leaders in relation to the implementation of the UN 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, in a [Declaration](#) by Federica Mogherini on behalf of the European Union on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In September, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) issued a Global Call for Action 2016 with “Lot 4: support to the rights of persons belonging to minorities and persons affected by caste-based discrimination”. This specific lot comes following many year of IDSN engagement with EU institutions. The funding allocated for this lot is 3.58 million EURO. The grants from Lot 4 should enable a number of civil society organisations to address caste related human rights issues and development challenges in caste-affected countries, internationally and regionally. IDSN submitted a proposal with two co-applicants from Pakistan and India, respectively. The title of the application is “Framing the future for non-discrimination; tackling caste discrimination with universal tools and local support”.



## EP Human Rights Report

### European Parliament report calls for EU policy on caste discrimination

In its 2016 “Report on the Annual Report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter” the European Parliament (EP) raises deep concern over grave violations of Dalit human rights. The report calls for an EU policy development on caste discrimination.

The report, released by the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs, states that the European Parliament is “deeply concerned by the alarming rate of caste-based violent attacks on Dalits and of institutionalised discrimination with impunity,” and condemns, “continuing human rights violations committed against people suffering from caste hierarchies and caste-based discrimination, including the denial of equality and of access to the legal system and to employment, and the continued segregation and caste-induced barriers to the achievement of basic human rights and development.”

The report furthermore calls on the EU institutions to address caste discrimination on par with other causes of discrimination and “reiterates its call for an EU policy development on caste discrimination.”

On 16 September, Rikke Nöhrind participated in the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) regular meeting and a meeting between Stavros Lambrinidis from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and HRDN members.

Later in September, an IDSN delegation participated in a workshop organised by the European External Action Service in preparation for a new EU anti-discrimination handbook for which IDSN had also submitted written input. IDSN board members Renu Sijapati (FEDO) and Paul Divakar (NCDHR) participated alongside Director Rikke Nöhrind in a series of meetings with EEAS staff, EIDHR officials, and MEP assistants.

The ‘[Annual Report](#)’ on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter’, released by the European Parliament in December, contained twice as many references to caste discrimination as in previous years and called for an EU policy on the issue.

## Communication and networking

In 2016 the engagement with IDSN communication channels including the website, newsletter and social media continued to rise. IDSN issued several press statements, reports, analysis and news articles. IDSN also continued to engage with press and increasing coverage of the issue of caste in the media is witnessed throughout the network. Hundreds of new entries to the IDSN documentation database were also added and categorised.

### Newsletter, social media and the IDSN website

The IDSN newsletter continues to be the only newsletter capturing core developments on caste-based discrimination at a global level including UN and EU action on this issue. In 2016, the total number of subscribers to the IDSN newsletter grew by about 6% to nearly 1500 subscribers. Subscribers include UN and EU officials, politicians, and activists.

On average, three IDSN news articles were published per month and these articles, as well as reports and stories gathered from members, associates and media coverage, were published in the newsletters. IDSN members and associates also use the newsletter to stay updated on developments and draw inspiration from the struggle to end caste discrimination nationally, regionally and globally.

The IDSN website continues to be the leading global resource on caste-based discrimination with a particularly strong user base coming from Dalit rights organisations and activists, universities and other organisations. In 2016, the IDSN website had 43,000 unique visitors and 100,000 pageviews. This is a rise of 21% in unique visitors compared to 2015 and an 8% rise in pageviews. There were 56,000 visits to the IDSN website, rising 19% compared to last year.

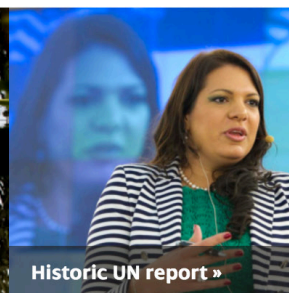
The website reaches a wide global audience. In 2016, the top ten countries visiting the site were India, United States, United Kingdom, Denmark, Nepal, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Australia and Pakistan. The same global spread in users is seen on the IDSN Facebook page.

IDSN’s social media channels continue to form a base for both internal and external communications with IDSN members and international associates, interacting with IDSN regularly via social media and cross promoting news and documentation. IDSN’s Facebook fans rose by 25% to 8412 in 2016 and followers on Twitter increased by 48% to more than 1300 followers with UN officials including Special Rapporteurs, prominent journalists and opinion makers among the new followers.

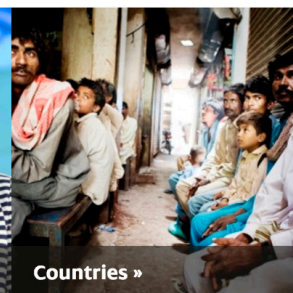
On IDSN’s YouTube channel, views of IDSN’s online introductory video on Dalit women rose by 85% to 94,700 views and views of the IDSN intro video on caste discrimination (including translated version) rose by 61% to



**Caste discrimination affects 260 million**  
involving massive violations of basic human rights »



**Historic UN report »**



**Countries »**



**Dalit Women »**



**Annual Report 2015 »**

44,800. IDSN's older intro video 'I'm Dalit How Are You?' also continues to gather views, now at 202,000. IDSN also maintains an online video playlist library on its YouTube channel organised both thematically and by countries.

Throughout the year the IDSN Communication Officer continued to add new documentation links to the IDSN documentation database, which are categorised and searchable on [idsn.org/links](https://idsn.org/links).

## Press statements, reports and briefing notes

IDSN wrote several briefing notes including an extensive [briefing paper](#) on 'Caste Discrimination in India'. IDSN also wrote a [report](#) on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights side-event at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council, where the report on caste by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues was released.

In connection with the release of the report IDSN issued a [joint press release](#) with Human Rights Watch and Minority Rights Group entitled "UN Expert calls on states to end caste discrimination". The press release was widely circulated by all organisations involved.

IDSN also issued a [press release](#) following the 18th deferral of the IDSN's application for UN ECOSOC consultative status by the Committee on NGOs. This press release was promoted through IDSN channels as well as by the International Service on Human Rights (ISHR).

In connection with the 4th Global Women Deliver Conference held in Copenhagen in May, IDSN and the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) issued a [joint press release](#) calling on conference participants to address discrimination against the millions of women who belong to caste-affected groups and indigenous people.

## Raising awareness at Women Deliver

The now former IDSN Executive Director, Rikke Nöhrhnd, was interviewed by the Danish Radio channel P1, and did a TV interview with Danish Television (DR2) in connection with the Conference. The interviews focused on Violence against women in India, Dalit Women and the SDGs and the role of the international community in addressing caste-based discrimination.

IDSN also participated in the conference and shared a stand with IWGIA for an NGO event attended by the Danish Minister of development cooperation and the UN president of the General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft.

## A rise in media coverage

Network members observed a rise in media coverage of caste issues in 2016 and IDSN continued to liaise with media, monitor press clippings and input into the debate.

Throughout the year IDSN responded to requests for background, contacts and input from journalists and editors at media such as Reuters, national level news media and web media.

Rikke Nöhrhnd was also interviewed by the ProtestInfo press agency in Geneva in March together with Bangladeshi human rights campaigner Monjun Nahar from the Network of Non-Mainstream Marginalised Communities.



A group of “barefoot lawyer” women meet through an initiative started by IDS*N* member Jan Sahas, that has been campaigning against the practice of manual scavenging for 12 years. The barefoot lawyers initiative trains men and women from all communities to fight against the practice of manual scavenging.

Photo by Suchit Nanda/Jan Sahas

## Caste-affected countries

The shrinking of space for civil society continues to be a key problem across caste-affected countries. In spite of this, political dialogue on caste-based discrimination between government, civil society, politicians and key stakeholders, such as UN agencies and the ILO, and in India private sector entities, has been ongoing.

In May 2016, the Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) submitted the ADRF [Demands](#) for Inclusion of Dalits in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Aid to the UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon, during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. In a brief meeting with Ki-moon ADRF demanded inclusion at planning, implementation and policy Level of disaster risk reduction actions.

In South Asia, two key regional [events](#) on caste discrimination were held by network members in 2016. These were the South Asian conference on Dalit rights, held in late February in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the South Asian Regional People’s Tribunal on Atrocities against Dalits, which took place in New Delhi, India, in March. Details of these events and other developments in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan can be found in the country sections later in this report.

Developments in other caste-affected countries including Yemen, Mauritania, Sri Lanka and Japan were also monitored and reported on by IDS*N* in 2016.

In the report ‘Minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status’ released by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsák-Ndiaye in 2016, caste discrimination across the globe was covered including in Somalia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Madagasca, Sri Lanka, Japan and Yemen.

Caste-affected people from across the world took part in the UN side-event on the report and a speaker from Mauritania called for more attention to the issue.

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**“Caste discrimination is a poison within Mauritanian society. We need a campaign against it and very strong legislation that prohibits discrimination against lower castes.”** Salimata Lam, coordinator of SOS-Esclaves, an organisation working against caste-based slavery in Mauritania.

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In 2016, Izsák-Ndiaye also visited Sri Lanka. The rapporteur highlighted that low-caste groups in Sri Lanka, as well as other countries in South Asia, suffer ‘from acute caste discrimination throughout all the phases of disaster response, from rescue to rehabilitation’ and are most

affected by climate change. In a statement following her visit she urged the Government to take concrete steps to protect Sri Lanka’s minorities.

IDS*N* International Associate Minority Rights Group (MRG) also released a [report](#) on Yemen in 2016. The report finds that the Muhamasheen, discriminated on the basis of caste, reside in some of the worst hit areas of the war torn country, but face exclusion in access to shelter, relief articles and health facilities. The report highlights that the Muhamasheen are at risk of death, disease, hunger and further violence, and urges humanitarian actors and the international community to step up efforts to offer relief to these communities.

In Mauritania, two slavery-related court [verdicts](#) in mid-May 2016, were hailed as potential ‘game changers’ by IDS*N* International Associate, Anti-Slavery International. Slavery in Mauritania is caste-based and especially affects the country’s Haratine population. On May 17 the Supreme Court freed two anti-slavery activists who had been jailed in 2014 due to a peaceful protest against slavery practices. The previous day had seen the first ever conviction by the Special Courts for slavery, as two slave-owners both received a five-year prison sentence, and were ordered to pay significant compensation to two female victims.

The continued discrimination against Buraku communities in Japan was also noted in several reports.

Developments in the United Kingdom are covered in the Dalit Solidarity Networks chapter of this report. In terms of caste discrimination in the diaspora, 2016 also saw the launch of the “Caste in the Diaspora Global Survey” by the Dalit American Foundation in collaboration with the Ambedkar International Mission, Ambedkar Association of North America, and the Dalit American Women’s Association. The survey calls on all South Asian diaspora communities to take part and aims to collect primary data on ‘how past and present class status or political leanings are connected to caste, how caste behaviours have changed post-immigration and to what extent caste discrimination is practiced in schools, places of employment or places of worship’. IDS*N* also disseminated the survey link through the network communication channels.

Throughout the year network members and associates jointly participated in events at the UN and EU level. IDS*N* works with a range of Dalit rights and human rights organisations in South Asia, and links up with other in-country stakeholders but does not make grants to national level activities.



## India

While IDSN has been pushing for action to end caste discrimination at the international level, IDSN members in India have been monitoring the situation of Dalits in India and advocating for the implementation of legislation as well as running key programmes to protect Dalit rights and empower Dalit communities.

IDSN members National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), People's Watch, Jan Sahas, Navsarjan Trust, the National Federation of Dalit Women and international associates, as well as other key human rights organisations, continued to highlight human rights abuses related to caste and call for increased action by the Indian Government.

In May 2016, a coalition of Indian civil society groups, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, released a 'Citizens' Report' assessing the second year performance of the government led by prime minister Narendra Modi. The report welcomes amendments to the SC/ST PoA Act, which is supposed to protect Dalits and Adivasis, but also calls for effective implementation. It criticizes poor allocation of government funds for Dalits and notes that they are excluded from the Sustainable Development Goals. It also calls for a 'Rohith Act', referring to the suicide of a young Dalit scholar in 2016, to address caste discrimination in educational institutions.

Human Rights Watch has also raised the issue of caste discrimination in India on numerous occasions including in a [report](#) on how criminal law is used to limit peaceful expression in India, stifle political dissent and target religious minorities and marginalised communities, including Dalits. The report presented several examples of how criminal laws are used to limit the free speech of Dalits.

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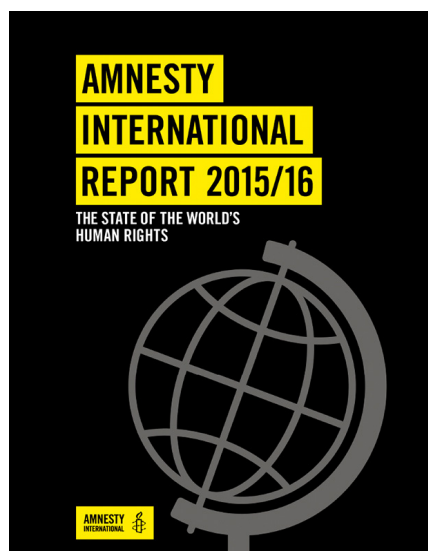
**"India's abusive laws are the hallmark of a repressive society, not a vibrant democracy."** Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director, Human Rights Watch.

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On a similar note the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association, Maina Kiai, published a legal analysis of India's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) in 2016. Mr. Kiai stated that the act could be used to silence organisations that criticize the government and that it contravenes the country's international obligations.

In 2016, Human Rights Watch submitted a written [letter](#) to the EU ahead of the EU-India summit where they pointed out the failure of the Indian government to protect the Dalit population. The letter urged the EU to encourage the Indian government to take immediate steps to eliminate abuses against Dalits, provide concrete plans to implement laws to secure their protection, and end manual scavenging.





## Human Rights

*Amnesty International - The State of the World's Human Rights Report 2015/2016*

Discrimination and violence based on gender and caste remains pervasive in India, Amnesty International says in its annual report on the state of the world's human rights published in 2016.

In a chapter on caste-based discrimination and violence, the organisation notes the alarming figures of crimes committed against Dalits and raises concern over dominant castes use of sexual violence against Dalit and Adivasi women and girls, discrimination against Dalit children in schools, curtailing of the freedom of expression of Dalits and discrimination in the criminal justice system.

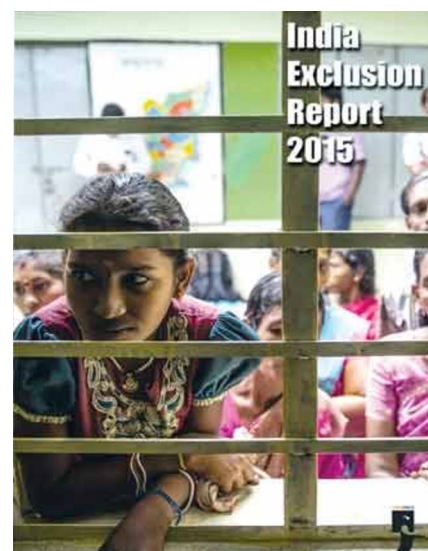


## Slavery

*The Global Slavery Index 2016*

India is home to the largest total number of slaves in the world, and many of them are Dalits. According to the Global Slavery Index 2016, 18.4 million slaves – or approximately 40 per cent of the world total – live in India.

The report states that deep structural inequalities along caste lines is a highly relevant factor in the vulnerability to slavery in India. The survey includes a case study from Uttar Pradesh and notes that the state's 40 million Dalits are "particularly vulnerable to caste-based slavery such as manual scavenging," and that "When they seek to leave or refuse to do this work, they face violence and abuse."



## Exclusion

*India Exclusion Report released in 2016*

The report stressed the continuing exclusion of Dalits from key public goods and services with particular emphasis on urban health, water and sanitation and access to equal and dignified work for women.

The report also stated that there continues to be an intersection between sexual slavery and caste oppression using the Devadasi practice as an example of caste-based prostitution.

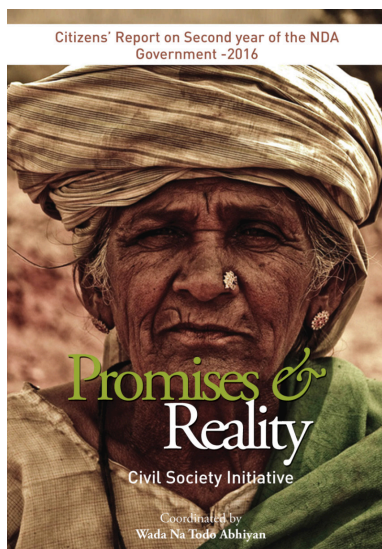
The report looks at many factors affecting exclusion in India with a key focus on the role of the state in both perpetuating exclusion and combatting it.

Furthermore, On 7 June, the Asia Policy Director of Human Rights Watch, John Sifton, testified before a human rights hearing on India in the United States Congress. The hearing coincided with the arrival in the US of Indian Prime Minister Modi. Sifton made numerous references to caste discrimination and called on Members of Congress to include the issue in their dialogues with the Indian authorities.

**"The United States Government should also encourage US companies investing in India to ensure that their hiring and management practices do not further entrench caste or other discrimination."** Asia Policy Director of Human Rights Watch, John Sifton, stated at the human rights hearing at the US Congress.

In its 2016 State of the World's Human Rights Report, Amnesty International wrote that discrimination based on gender and caste remains pervasive in India and noted with alarm the high number of crimes against Dalits in India. Also the India Exclusion Report published in 2016 stressed the continuing exclusion of Dalits from key public goods and services in their review with particular emphasis on urban health, urban water and sanitation and access to equal and dignified work for women. The report also stated that there is an intersection between sexual slavery and caste oppression.

In her global report on caste discrimination, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues also highlights human rights violations against Dalits in India and offers key recommendations for stepping up action to combat this scourge. The report is covered in depth in the UN chapter earlier in this report.



## Accountability

*Report: Promises and Reality: Citizen's Report on Second year of the NDA Government*

The report released by a coalition of Indian civil society groups, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, assesses the second year performance of the government led by Narendra Modi. The report calls for effective implementation of legislation. It criticizes poor allocation of government funds for Dalits and notes that they are excluded from the Sustainable Development Goals. It also calls for a 'Rohith Act', referring to the suicide of a young Dalit scholar in 2016, to address caste discrimination in educational institutions.



## Caste-based slavery

*Report: Fabric of Slavery - Large-scale forced (child) labour in South India's spinning mills.*

The report, released by the India Committee on the Netherlands (ICN) shows that despite efforts to curb child slavery in India's spinning mills the practice continues and 60% of the victims are Dalits. It finds that various forms of modern slavery is found in more than 90% of the spinning mills in South India and that those who are enslaved may have their wages withheld, be locked up in company-controlled hostels, work long hours, or face sexual harassment. The report also offers a set of key recommendations for stakeholders.



## Silencing

*HRW Report: Stifling Dissent: The Criminalization of Peaceful Expression*

Human Rights Watch raised the issue of caste discrimination in a report on how criminal law is used to limit peaceful expression in India, stifle political dissent and target religious minorities and marginalised communities, including Dalits. The report presented several examples of how criminal laws are used to limit the free speech of Dalits.

The report states that, "Counterterrorism laws have been used disproportionately against religious minorities and marginalised groups such as Dalits."

The UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Leilani Farha, visited India on 11-22 April and called on the state to legislate to combat all forms of "de facto housing discrimination" against any individual or groups, including Dalits. She also raised grave concern over the state of Dalit housing and their access to basic services at home.

IDSN members including Navsarjan, Jan Sahas and AIDMAM (NCDHR) continued in 2016 to march and push for Dalit women's rights and self-respect, alongside other organisations. This included training young Dalit women activists, staging marches, social media events and offering support to Dalit women struggling for justice.

Throughout the year links were forged between Dalit women's groups in India and similar marginalised groups at the global level. The social media hashtag #dalitwomenfight continues to be used by Dalit women

campaigning for their rights and #DalitLivesMatter raised the bar alongside #BlackLivesMatter. Several Dalit women travelled to the US to learn and share with groups of black American women. Dalit women engaged in a two month tour of college campuses and other venues in the United States, where they exchanged strategies and presented accounts of the situation of Dalit women in India.

**"Our challenges are strikingly similar to what the Romas face in Europe, or blacks in the United States, and if we stand together the demands and articulations of each community becomes so much more powerful."** General Secretary of the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), Asha Kotwal



## Cases that mobilized mass protest

### Atrocities and protests in Una, Gujarat



based discrimination". IDSN members in India showed their solidarity and raised awareness of the need to fight caste atrocities. IDSN also facilitated that the case was raised in the European Parliament and brought to the attention of key UN officials. Photo by - Manjula Pradeep.

In 2016, Seven Dalits in Una, Gujarat were publicly assaulted and humiliated by dominant caste members of a 'Cow Protection Committee' for skinning a dead cattle. Four of the Dalit youths were flogged in public by the dominant caste members who consider the cow a sacred animal. The events were caught on video and sparked massive protests in India's Gujarat state in response to atrocities against the community. The 10-day "Dalit Pride March" culminated in Una town in southern Gujarat on August 15 - India's Independence Day - as Dalits pledged to seek "freedom from atrocities and caste-

### Rohith Vemula's Suicide



assert their rights. His untimely death continues to attract national and international attention. IDSN members in India conducted a fact finding mission and took part in protests. IDSN published two articles on the suicide, the reactions and the issue of caste-based discrimination in higher education in India and ensured that awareness was raised within the international community. Photo by Joe Athialy - CC license.

The suicide of 26 year old Indian PhD-student and Dalit rights activist, Rohith Vemula, caused widespread protest and reactions at many levels in India. Rohith Vemula was an activist who fought for the rights of Dalits and other marginalised students. He had been suspended by the University of Hyderabad following an incident involving supporters of India's ruling BJP party. His suicide is widely seen as a consequence of the often hidden discrimination that Dalits suffer on university campuses and the oppression they face if they try to

### Young Dalit woman brutally murdered in Kerala

Public protests followed in the wake of the brutal murder of a 30-year old Dalit woman in Kerala. Her mutilated body was found in her home with numerous stab wounds, parts of her intestines had been pulled out, and there were signs of strangulation and rape. The brutality was so extreme that the case led to comparisons with the 2012 Delhi gang rape. The difference was that the Kerala victim was a Dalit, and the authorities have been accused of reacting slowly to the crime. Protesters took to the streets demanding a fast investigation.

## Atrocities and Injustice

Reports of brutal violence and atrocities committed by dominant castes against Dalits continued to plague India in 2016. Gang-rapes, rapes and sexual violence against Dalit women were continuously reported by IDSN network members as well as the news media as was retaliation violence in relation to Dalits asserting their rights.

Reports from IDSN network members in India say that the rise in violence and atrocities against Dalits in India

continues and that access to justice is deeply flawed by bias and discrimination.

In March 2016, two People's [Tribunals](#) on caste-based discrimination took place in New Delhi. The first one focused on India, while the Regional People's Tribunal – organised by Dalit groups from India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Asia Dalit Rights Forum – was the first of its kind. Both tribunals presented cases of violence and atrocities against Dalits to eminent jurists from the South Asia region.

A debate on Dalit atrocities was held in the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) in August 2016 after reports of a series of violent attacks against Dalits on caste grounds. One of the cases, called 'the Una incident', triggered nationwide protests and solidarity demonstrations in several countries including the United States. The attack in Una, Gujarat, on four young Dalit men, who were skinning cows killed by a lion, involved mob beatings with sticks and rods for hours.

Human rights organisations accuse the police of complicity and involvement in the atrocities, as the police present took no action to stop the violence, and eventually locked up the four Dalit men in police custody.

Dalit activists and groups from all parts of India came to Gujarat to participate in a rally in August in solidarity with the Una Dalits. Across India in 2016, so-called 'cow vigilantes' have been spreading violence and committing atrocities against Dalits in the name of 'protection of cows'.

The Una case prompted the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the National Movement on Dalit justice – NCDHR to issue a [briefing](#) on standards for investigation and protection of victims and witnesses in incidents of caste atrocities. The briefing highlights standards and safeguards in investigation of caste atrocity cases and the steps required to be taken against the police for negligence.

Many other cases of caste-based violence in India were also reported in 2016. This includes the gang-rape of a 20 year-old Dalit woman in Haryana by the same group of men for the second time in three years, and the brutal murder of a young Dalit woman in Kerala, which also sparked protests.

Another [case](#) that sparked widespread protest was the suicide of Dalit PHD student, Rohith Vemula. Rohith Vemula was an activist who fought for the rights of Dalit and other marginalised students. See the box on page 20 for details.

Following Rohith Vemula's death, there were nationwide student protests in India. The protests brought together Dalit and leftwing groups, united to "fight for the marginalised" and claim "justice for Rohith". Protesters were opposed by authorities as well as Hindu nationalist groups.

On 22 March, student demonstrators at Hyderabad Central University were violently attacked by police who forcefully detained 29 protesters, brutally beat them and held them in undisclosed locations for more than 24 hours. During the clashes, female students were kicked and threatened with rape.

An independent team of human rights defenders – including leading Dalit activists – visited the university campus following the incident. The fact-finding team was highly critical towards the way the authorities handled the protests by students who were upset by the reinstatement of the University's controversial Vice Chancellor, Appa Rao.

In an open statement, they expressed concern about "the pattern of the growing nexus between student vigilante groups, youth wing of the ruling party (BJP), state and university authorities in colleges and university campuses across the country in order to mobilise the state machinery against vulnerable students. This has created a climate of fear and oppression in the country."

A group of 300 international scholars, including prominent historian and political activist, Noam Chomsky, strongly [condemned](#) the "state violence and unlawful detention of faculty and student protesters" and voiced support for the students calling for the suspension of Appa Rao.

Rohith Vemula's suicide also created further international attention. At the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council, Nitin Gangurde, a Dalit student activist, raised the issue at a debate on racism. The case was also discussed in the European Parliament.

Injustice was also brought to the fore when NCDHR conducted a public event on 1st March 2016 at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, to highlight huge budget cuts of more than 50% of the funds from sub-plans for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) in the Union Budget 2016, by the Minister of Finance. Around 200 people from different walks of life participated in the protest and demanded proportionate funds for the targeted beneficiaries.

The earmarked sub-plans for Dalits and Adivasis are meant to support the welfare of these groups and expand their opportunities to participate in society and the labour market on equal footing with dominant caste groups. When these funds are cut and diverted to other unrelated posts Dalits are shortchanged and are therefore more vulnerable to exploitation, including forced and bonded labour.

### **Bonded labour and modern slavery**

According to the Global Slavery Index 2016, approximately 40 percent of the world total number of slaves live in India. Many of them are Dalits, who are particularly vulnerable to modern slavery in the forms of bonded labour, child labour, caste-based prostitution or manual scavenging. In 2016 fresh documentation was published on Dalits and modern slavery.

The survey includes a case study from Uttar Pradesh and notes that the state's 40 million Dalits are "particularly vulnerable to caste-based slavery such as manual scavenging."

In 2016, a harrowing and moving in-depth [report](#) was released by the Peoples' Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), in which bonded labourers in India's brick kilns tell their stories. They are usually Dalits or Adivasis and suffer terrible forms of discrimination. Their children





die, women and girls are sexually exploited and men are beaten up if they ask for money. In a positive development, the Thomson Reuters Foundation reported that hundreds of female brick-kiln workers in Punjab had gathered to demand equal pay and better accommodation.

The [report](#) 'Stitching Our Shoes - Homeworkers in South India' - on the role of homeworkers in global supply chains, and the effect of caste and gender discrimination, was also released, linking caste and labour exploitation.

The India Committee on the Netherlands (ICN) released the report 'Fabric of Slavery – Large-scale forced (child) labour in India's spinning mills' showing that various forms of modern slavery, including child slavery, are found in more than 90% of the spinning mills in South India. These spinning mills produce yarn for Indian, Bangladeshi and Chinese garment factories that produce garments for the Western market. The report was released in December 2016 and received widespread media coverage. IDSN also published a web news article on this report and spread awareness through media and advocacy channels.

Despite being banned, reports of manual scavenging (the practice of women or men being made to remove human waste from dry latrines, sewers or railways by hand and simple tools) continues across India. It is estimated that the practice costs 1,200 people their life every year.

In 2016, a group of activist representing the manual scavenging community carried the message 'Stop killing

us – in dry latrines, sewers and septic tanks' across India. On their way they gave hope to people involved in this inhuman practice and informed them of their rights.

The activists – from the anti-scavenging movement Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) – launched the Bhim Yatra in December 2015, and have since visited 500 districts in 30 states. They have covered more than 35,000 kilometres, talked to thousands of ordinary people and raised the issue with political leaders, including President Pranab Mukherjee.

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**"Is it because Dalits are in manual scavenging, the government is not serious about their rehabilitation. Had members of other castes been involved, some solution would have surely been found."** Dr Bezwada Wilson, National Convenor of SKA, a campaign to end manual scavenging

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IDSN member Jan Sahas also raised awareness of the need to end this dehumanising practice and carried out programmes to support Dalit women to leave this work including the "barefoot lawyer" initiative that trains men and women from all communities to fight against the practice of manual scavenging (see photo on pg. 17). Since the launch of the programme, 800 girls and young women have been trained in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Natural disasters such as flooding and drought hit Dalits harder as discrimination in relief and rebuilding work leaves Dalits at a disadvantage. In 2016 IDSN members in India presented evidence of discrimination and pushed for action to ensure equality in disaster relief operations and disaster risk reduction efforts.

Photo by: Jakob Carlsen

## Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

In 2016, a severe drought in India was estimated to affect 330 million people and it was reported that women and Dalits were suffering the most under this disaster. The National Dalit Watch (NDW) of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), monitored the situation and noted that relief measures were not reaching landless Dalits. They are more vulnerable to disasters because of their marginal social standing, caste discrimination and because they tend to live in settlements segregated from mainstream society.

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**“Most Dalits are sharecroppers whose names are not in the records of the landowners, so they miss out on government relief.”** Rajesh Singh of National Dalit Watch

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Earlier in the year National Dalit Watch released a comprehensive [report](#) entitled “Leaving Vulnerable Behind” on caste discrimination in relief work following the Tamil Nadu Floods, covering six affected districts.

Following the release of the report the Office of the Vice President of India gave a clear directive to the Tamil Nadu State government to take steps on Dalit inclusion, in post flood responses. The National Human Rights Commission also directed the state government on Inclusion of Dalits in flood relief and rehabilitation work.

This first Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) was hosted by the Government of India in November 2016. Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) and National Dalit Watch (NDW), in association with Sphere India, organised a pre-event meeting on Inclusion in Disaster response and rehabilitation. This event gave a platform for all organisations working on defending the rights of excluded groups to come together to address inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

In June 2016, India released a new National Disaster Management Plan which failed to address the needs of vulnerable groups. This failure could lead to millions of women, children, disabled and elderly people as well as lower caste and tribal communities being put at further risk. The now former IDSN Executive Director was interviewed for a Thomson-Reuters [article](#) on this and stated that the plan was disappointing as, “it fails to consider the specific needs of Dalits and other vulnerable groups.”

In her 2016 report on caste the Special Rapporteur on minority issues also highlighted the need to address caste discrimination explicitly in disaster relief responses and planning.

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**“Specific measures should be developed to tackle discrimination, including on the grounds of caste, in all development and disaster recovery actions and programming.”** From the report ‘Minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status’ by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues

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## Human Rights Defenders awarded

As outlined in this chapter India continues to face grave caste-related human rights violations and human rights defenders in India face threats and abuse.

Throughout 2016, a national network for the protection and promotion of human rights defenders, Human Rights Defenders Alert, took up several cases of harassment, intimidation, threats and arbitrary arrests of Dalit rights activists and others.

As a small token of appreciation for their dedication and work several Dalit rights defenders received awards in 2016. The prominent Indian human rights campaigner, Director of People's Watch and IDSN board member, Henri Tiphagne, [received](#) Amnesty International Germany's Human Rights Award in Berlin on 25 April. He has been fighting caste discrimination for decades. Raksha Ram Chamar (Harijan) from the Madhesi Dalit community was awarded the first Darnal International Award for Social Justice, and Lenin Raghuvanshi received the M.A. Thomas National Human Rights Award 2016 for his work with the marginalised community, particularly the Dalits and Adivasis (tribal people) in Varanasi. Bezwada Wilson also received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award 2016 for his efforts in leading a grassroots movement to eradicate the degrading practice of manual scavenging in India.



Dalit women in Nepal continued to face severe discrimination on the basis of both caste and gender. In 2016, IDS members in Nepal have pushed for implementation of key acts protecting the rights of Dalits and women. Photo by Jakob Carlsen

## Nepal

In 2016, IDS members in Nepal the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF), The Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO), Nepal Dalit National Social Welfare Organisation (NNDSWO) and Jagaran Media Center (JMC) continued to push for Dalit rights protection and the implementation of key anti-discrimination laws. They also engaged with media and spread awareness among Dalit communities of their rights and how to obtain justice.

### Access to justice

Despite a number of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws being in place, including the Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act (2011), IDS members in Nepal report that the laws are not properly implemented in Nepal. In 2016, it was reported that cases of caste discrimination rarely reach court with only 45 cases registered in Nepal's court system in the past four years.

Durga Sob, founder of the Feminist Dalit Organisation, gave several media interviews on this matter explaining that exclusion of Dalits is so deeply rooted in Nepal that victims of caste discrimination are unable to speak up for their rights. She also stated that Madhesi Dalit women are especially battling discriminatory practices such as untouchability, child labour, and child marriage, and are deprived of education and job opportunities.

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**"The media can help minimise the social disorder and play an active role in implementing the constitution. The media can help bring the problems faced by the Madhesi Dalit women to light, and draw the government's attention to their plight."** Durga Sob, Feminist Dalit Organisation, speaking to the Himalayan Times

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According to a report by the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) 90 per cent of Nepali women have not been able to exercise rights granted by the state, and 23 per cent of these women belong to the Madhesi Dalit community.

The Himalayan Times also [reported](#) on the release of a 21-point manifesto asserting that the government should implement the constitution, and Dalit women should be provided education, job opportunities, basic needs, and separate quota in governmental services.

The manifesto also calls upon the government to act against racial discrimination, child marriage, and child labour.

A combination of a culture of caste discrimination in the judiciary and law enforcement in Nepal and a lack of awareness among Dalits of their rights means that the laws are not delivering the protection and justice that they are meant to.

IDS members report that the attitudes, priorities and interests of major stakeholders (CDO/DSP) and other law enforcement agencies is one of reluctance and a lack of action – when it comes to caste. Political leaders are also seen to be divided by ideology and for cadre protection.

The general public overall are also not seen to accept that caste discrimination is a crime. This makes it a great challenge when dealing with cases of caste discrimination and untouchability and gaining justice for the victims.

IDS members in Nepal have therefore focused on supporting Dalits in pursuing justice in cases of discrimination and atrocities and spreading awareness of the rights of Dalits and the laws in place.

This includes the dissemination of anti-discrimination laws and human rights standards among people in rural areas through inter-community dialogues and radio programs, fact finding of critical cases and lobbying with authorities for assuring justice to the victim.

Another key effort was a campaign to enhance information and access to local budgets and entitlements. It is reported that the budget advocacy campaign brought an observable momentum to increase the use of participatory planning processes, transparency in the use of local budgets, and access to resources for Dalits.

Other initiatives undertaken in Nepal include the cooperation and coordination with the National Dalit Commission (NDC) in case monitoring, and dialogues for the functioning and effectiveness of the mechanisms for elimination of caste based discrimination. In coordination with the NDC, a national level fact finding mission was carried out in 2016 in relation to five major incidences of caste-based discrimination.

A study on the implementation status of the Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act (2011) was also conducted and preliminary findings of the report were shared with national level stakeholders in the presence of the Law Minister and representatives of the National Dalit Commission and the National Human Rights Commission.



Two regional level conferences, one national level discourse and two other civil society meetings were also organised by IDSN member NNDSWO, addressing the underlying issues behind the lack of implementation and the need for multi stakeholder engagement.

### **Discrimination in disaster relief**

Nepal continues to suffer the consequences of the devastating earthquake in 2015 and IDSN members in Nepal report that Dalits suffer even more due to discrimination in relief and reconstruction efforts.

A number of government agencies, UN agencies and NGOs have carried out a joint [assessment](#) of food security, livelihoods and early recovery in more than 4,000 Nepalese households in 11 earthquake-affected districts. The survey notes that inadequate food consumption was highest among Dalit households, over a third of whom (33.6%) fell below the acceptable threshold for food consumption, making caste a strong predictor for this indicator at the household level.

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**“About 60% Dalit people felt discrimination during relief and rescue operation time which is a denial of human rights and dignity of people.”** Bhakta

Bishwakarma, representing IDSN and NNDSWO, speaking at the 2016 UN Forum on Minority Issues

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Bhakta Bishwakarma, representing IDSN and NNDSWO, spoke at the UN Forum on Minority Issues to highlight the particular vulnerability of Dalits in relation to disasters. “Disaster policies and programs have not been inclusive and sensitive enough towards the most marginalised - Dalits, women, children, people with disabilities, senior citizens etc. Despite a number of interventions by the government, the tangible changes have not been seen even after one and half year of the devastation. People are still waiting for sustainable recovery,” he explained to the forum participants.

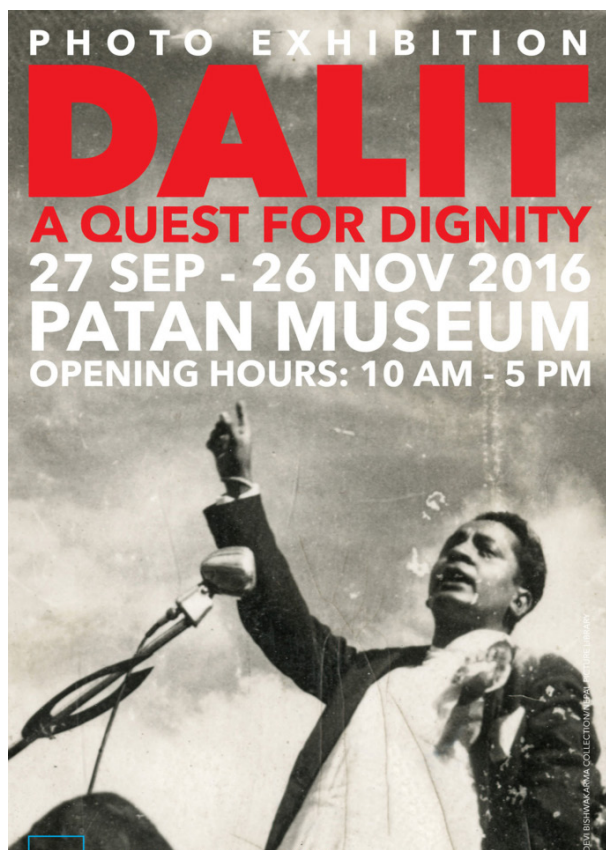
### **Raising Awareness**

In 2016, the web portal [dalithumanrights.org.np](http://dalithumanrights.org.np) was also developed and launched by IDSN members NNDSWO and Jagaran Media Center (JMC). It has broadened the reach of information on caste discrimination in Nepal not only nationally but also globally.

The website is a media based advocacy platform reporting stories of caste discrimination from human rights perspectives and taking the initiatives to address the problems through urgent appeals, statements and press releases. It is particularly aimed at connecting youths around the issue of caste discrimination. The web portal will also be a medium to share lessons learnt and challenges of human rights and governance in relation to Dalit rights.



Dalit human rights defenders in Pakistan continue to face threats and harassment for carrying out their work. Photo by Jakob Carlsen



A photo exhibition entitled “Dalit: A Quest for Dignity” by the Nepal Picture Library was featured at the Patan Museum in September. The exhibition reflecting Nepali Dalits’ history and life explored various meanings of dignity for Nepali Dalits and includes more than 80 historical and contemporary photographs from 20 different contributors, including personal and institutional archives.

IDSN featured the exhibition in an [article](#) on the IDSN website and sent out through IDSN communication channels and the newsletter. Other media initiatives included IDSN members regularly giving media interviews with the national level press and NNDSWO conducting live media dialogues.

## Pakistan

2016 was a very significant year for the Dalit community in Pakistan. For the first time in history dozens of scheduled caste groups mobilised and gathered on one platform and joined the Dalit movement to fight for their rights in Pakistan. Dalit issues were highlighted, debated and discussed at all levels among civil society, media, and social media. Hundreds of articles were written in newspapers and books were published and launched by IDSN member PDSN and PILER on indigenous Dalit communities in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) reported that despite the increased visibility of the Dalit rights struggle, and the efforts by the Dalit rights movement, grave human rights violations grounded in discrimination continued, including persecution and targeted attacks. Hundreds of cases of kidnapping and forced conversion of Dalit girls were reported. Human rights activists experienced harassment and abuse. Thousands of Dalits are still trapped in bonded labour, slavery and live below the poverty line where their wives and daughters are sexually abused.

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**“Dalits are facing serious socio-economic issues but no policy is being framed to improve their living conditions. Nor is anything being done for their welfare”** Radha Bheel of the Dalit Sujag Tehreek (DST)

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## Coming together as a Dalit rights movement

In 2016, A collective Dalit movement entitled the Dalit Sujag Tehrik (DST) was formed. The formation of the movement was led by IDSN member, the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network. Hundreds of Dalit activist from all scheduled castes, intellectuals, scholars and journalists joined DST and showed their concern by being actively involved and supporting this movement to empower the Dalit community. The purpose of DST is to develop a political consciousness among Dalits at the grassroots level to empower them to resist and struggle for their rights. The DST has also formed a number of committees and plan to establish Dalit schools, disseminate information and organise demonstrations.

A [manifesto](#) was also drafted and the DST can now count thousands of members across Sindh and Punjab. They arranged corner meetings, workshops, and awareness raising seminars on Dalit issues, inclusion of Dalits in the upcoming Census, forced religious conversion, land rights, rights of indigenous communities, rights to dignified life, education of Dalits, and non-representation of Dalits within Hindu civil society and in legislative assemblies.



In May 2016, a demonstration was organised to condemn increasing incidents of kidnapping and forced conversion of Dalit girls. Led by Radha Bheel of the DST, the protesters raised slogans against such incidents and demanded protection for the community.

### **New bills passed - steps in the right direction**

2016 was also a landmark year in passing pending laws from provincial and national assemblies in Sindh and Pakistan for the rights of Dalits and minorities. The Provincial Government Sindh, Pakistan passed three important pending laws, the Minority Rights Commission Bill 2015, the Criminal Law (Protection Of Minorities) Bill, 2016, and the Sindh Hindu Marriage Bill 2016. However, in the same year the federal Government passed the Hindu marriage bill, which is a very comprehensive bill covering all aspects related to marriage, divorce and maintenance, whereas the Sindh bill covers only marriage registration. Civil society are therefore demanding that either the Sindh Hindu Marriage Bill needs to be as comprehensive as the Federal Bill or the Federal Bill should be adopted through a resolution.

The formation of the Sindh Minority Rights Commission will be a driving force in fighting for justice in relation to human rights violations of minorities in the province of Sindh. It will also reiterate the values of religious harmony, tolerance, respect and peace inherent in the creation of Pakistan.

The Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) bill will make forced conversion of members of minority or

Dalit communities a cognizable offence. Similarly, the Hindu marriage bill will help to regularise marriages and other family matters such as divorce, maintenance and other related matters and minimise incidences of forced conversion of Dalit girls.

The religious and extremist groups in Pakistan, including Jamait Islami (JI), JUI F and some conservative political parties opposed "The Criminal Law (Protection Of Minorities) Bill, 2016", which makes it a punishable offense for anyone to force a child under 18 to change their religion and enter into a marriage. They oppose the bill because it contains a provision under which no one under 18 could convert to Islam even of their free will. The opponents of the bill threatened to bomb the Sindh secretariat who passed the bill and Dalit leaders, who were involved in advocating for the legislation, received death threats.

### **Human rights defenders under threat**

Generally the space for civil society and NGOs who work on human rights, peace and justice in Pakistan has further deteriorated in 2016. Many civil society organisations were not granted work permission and some were asked to stop their operations. Several activists and organisations work in hostile environments and receive threats. Operation Zarb-e-Azb launched by the Pakistani Army against terrorists and militant groups to promote peace, tolerance and a better human rights situation, has instead created a hostile environment for human rights activists and organisations.



Dalit leader Moni Rani Das in the colony where she lives. In 2016, IDS and the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) raised the need to act on ensuring the rights of Dalit women, at the UN CEDAW review of Bangladesh. Photo by: Jakob Carlsen

## Taking action through the United Nations

In 2016, the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) along with IDS submitted an alternative [report](#) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) for the review of Pakistan that took place in May 2016. The report highlighted several issues in relation to Dalit children such as discrimination in school, indifferent attitudes of teachers towards Dalit students, Dalit children in bonded labour, Dalit children and malnutrition, biased curriculum, and low enrolment and high dropout rates of Dalit children in schools. Issues of social exclusion and forced conversion of Dalit girls were also reported.

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**“Dalits are turned away from relief camps and have to live and sleep in the open air. Food, water and blankets are also diverted so that they do not reach the Dalits.”** Pirbhu Lal Satyani, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, oral statement at the UN Forum on Minority Issues

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PDSN coordinator Pirbhu Satyani also participated in the minority fellowship program by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) where he presented a [statement](#) at the Forum on Minority Issues. In his statement he highlighted the issues of Dalits being denied access to relief camps and facing discrimination in seeking assistance in 2010 and 2011 floodings. Satyani stated that due to poverty and social exclusion Dalits live in highly vulnerable places in Pakistan that are prone to all kinds of disasters. He recommended policy guidelines and suggested the involvement of Dalit people in preparedness activities and response plans.

## Bangladesh

Dalits in Bangladesh continue to live on the margins of society. The enactment of the Anti-Discrimination Act, meant to protect them and support their advancement, is still pending. Discrimination persists in education, housing, employment and on many other levels.

Throughout the year IDS members, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and Network of Non-Mainstreamed Marginalized Communities (NNMC) worked on political and grassroots levels to fight for Dalit rights.

A regional conference on caste discrimination was organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in March 2016 by BDERM, Nagorik Uddyog and the Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF).

Dalit women continue to be hard hit due to double discrimination and in 2016 BDERM and IDS took the struggle for Dalit women's rights in Bangladesh, to the UN.

### Dalit women in Bangladesh

Bangladesh was reviewed by the UN under the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2016. Prior to the review thirteen civil society organisations submitted alternative reports, outlining various issues that women and girls face in Bangladesh. Two of them highlighted concerns about the intersecting discrimination affecting women and girls, including caste-based discrimination.

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and IDS had jointly submitted an alternative [report](#) focusing on the situation for Dalit women in Bangladesh, ahead of the review. The report reiterated the concerns previously expressed by the committee and the concluding observations made by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues in her 2016 report on caste. It also included recommendations to consider caste and gender in the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda. It was noted that Dalit women in Bangladesh usually face threefold discrimination – on the grounds of caste, gender and economic status.

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**“They are discriminated by the dominant caste and other groups in society. While other groups of women and some Dalit men are moving forward in education, economic empowerment, access to justice and government services, Dalit women are left behind.”** IDS and BDERM - 2016 UN CEDAW review of Bangladesh

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FIAN International also outlined that Dalit women in Bangladesh face 'a triple burden, as women, as part of a minority community and minorities within minorities'.

BDERM and IDSN were present during the review in Geneva. Afsana Amin from BDERM, presented an oral [statement](#) to the CEDAW members. She emphasised that the lack of disaggregated data on gender and caste in Bangladesh results in the lack of programmes addressing the disadvantages that Dalit women face in education, political participation and access to basic services.

During the interactive dialogue with the state delegation the Committee posed a number of questions on Dalit women. One Committee member asked for a concrete timeline for passing the new Anti-Discrimination law. A committee member also requested information on the current measures taken to protect Dalit women and girls against social and physical violations and ensuring access to health services, housing, water and land.

Work also continued at the national level to ensure the rights of Dalit women. BDERM along with the Bangladesh Dalit Women Federation (BDWF) made this a priority area and participated in the global campaign '16 Days Activism to end violence against women and girls', highlighting the issues of Dalit women and girls. BDERM also took the initiative to conduct research on the situation of Dalit women as there is a lack of available data.

### Political advocacy for Dalit rights

IDSN members in Bangladesh also engaged in political advocacy with the Government, authorities and local institutions to further Dalit rights. A key point raised was

the need for the enactment of the Anti Discrimination Bill, which is still pending and has been for many years. NNMC and BDERM also brought up the issue of social safety nets for Dalits and BDERM continued the monitoring of proper implementation of the current Government social safety net programmes for Dalits. It was found that the Government is providing skill development training and giving stipendiums to Dalits, but that sometimes non-Dalits are receiving the allocations instead of Dalits. The issue of the lack of access to education for Dalits was also raised with the school committee.

Working to increase budget allocations for Dalits in Bangladesh was another key focus area for IDSN members. Previously allocations for Dalits have been directly specified. However, in the national budget of 2016-17, the term 'Dalit' has been removed and is covered under 'marginalised community'. BDERM therefore met with authorities after the budget declaration and raised the need to use the specific term Dalit in future budgets.

NNMC also organised advocacy meetings with the local government to increase the political participation of Dalits in different local government committees. The organisation furthermore held meetings with the Railway department to address the issue of land and housing of Dalits.

The International day for elimination of all forms of racial discrimination was observed across the country by IDSN members. Events like discussions and rallies were organised and policy makers, elected representatives and government officials were made aware of violations of the rights of Dalits and urged to act.





## Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe

Throughout 2016, Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe contributed actively to the efforts to eliminate caste-based discrimination through a mix of national and international advocacy interventions and awareness raising activities.

Most of the networks also participated at the IDSN General Assembly meeting in Geneva in March 2016 and at the release of the report on caste discrimination by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

### National and international political advocacy

The Dalit Solidarity Network in the UK focused both on fighting caste discrimination within the UK and abroad. One of the network's priorities was to push the government to enact Clause 9 (5)(a) of the Equality Act 2010, to make 'caste an aspect of race'.

The government indicated a lack of political will to implement the legislation. As a result, DSN-UK joined a coalition, including three other NGOs campaigning against caste-based discrimination in the UK, to challenge the government's inaction through a pre-action letter prepared by pro bono lawyers. This led to an [announcement](#) of a public consultation on the 2nd of September 2016, yet the terms and conditions of the consultation remained unknown by the end of the year.

DSN-UK also brought the issue of the enactment of the caste clause to the UN when they submitted a shadow [report](#) to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) prior to the UK review in August and attended NGO meetings in Geneva to raise the caste issue with the Committee members. As a result CERD [concluding observations](#) include a recommendation to enact Clause 9 (5)(a) of the Equality Act 2010 without further delay.

DSN-UK Director, Meena Varma was also invited to [speak](#) about caste-based discrimination in the UK at a panel with the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in Geneva. DSN-UK also made a submission to the International Development Select Committee inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals on the absence of attention to caste-based discrimination, in support of the Asia Dalit Rights Forum.

In November, a heated [debate](#) about caste-based discrimination was held at the Houses of Parliament in the UK, organised by the Indian Forum on British Media. Media coverage of the event was equally diverse implying different views of the topic. Hindu nationalists groups framed the legislation as anti-Hindu while those advocating for the legislation continued to explain that it was merely anti-discrimination, not aimed at any particular religious group.

In Germany, the Dalit Solidarity Network facilitated discussions about caste discrimination and the need for global action, between Dalit partners and German Parliamentarians.

Sandra Petersen (DSN-Norway), Asha Kowtal (NCDHR), Ramesh Nathan (NCDHR) and Einar Tjelle (DSN-Norway), in front of the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo.  
Photo by Monica Orjuela, NHRF.

In Norway, the Dalit Solidarity Network Norway provided a letter of input to the Norwegian White Paper on a future-oriented development policy in light of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The letter emphasised how working towards eliminating caste discrimination is essential to achieving the SDGs and eradicating all extreme poverty by 2030. The network also held dialogues with Norwegian stakeholders on the issue of caste discrimination.

In November, Ramesh Nathan and Asha Kowtal from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) visited Norway. As a Rafto laureate from 2007, the representatives of NCDHR participated at the 30th anniversary of the Rafto Foundation in Bergen and the Rafto Laureates Forum, including participants from high offices in the UN, in the EU, from the Norwegian government, and from a number of major international human rights organisations.

The forum discussed the deteriorating situation for human rights defenders around the world. Ramesh Nathan participated in a session on business responsibility, where he made a presentation on the ways in which caste-based discrimination is linked with ecological deprivation and the lack of access to justice. He emphasised that need for national guiding principles in relation to business and caste.

Asha Kowtal participated in a session on women human rights defenders emphasising the importance of the increasing difficulties faced by female Dalit activists, their lack of support systems and funding, the importance of building broader networks and the need to deal proactively with violence, surveillance and stress.

The representatives from NCDHR also visited Oslo and held meetings with the DSN network members and extended network, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to highlight the work being done to fight caste discrimination in India and the region.

The Norwegian network also approached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the report on caste discrimination of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, presented at the Human Rights Council's 31st session in Geneva. Norway subsequently gave a statement of support at the session.

In Finland, the Dalit Solidarity Network continued advocacy efforts to sensitise Finnish politicians and decision makers and push for action. In June, Finnish MEP Heidi Hautala with a group of other MEPs appealed to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini. In their letter the MEPs expressed their concern about caste discrimination and asked the High Representative to ensure that EU action to address caste discrimination is prioritised at the highest levels.

## Business and Human Rights

Caste discrimination is a key underlying factor in bonded labour and other forms of modern slavery in caste affected countries and several DSNs engaged in work related to business and human rights in 2016.

Dalit Solidarity Network - UK advocated for the rights of Dalits in India through a grassroots project co-implemented with the Tamil Nadu based organisation READ. The project is aimed at ending the Sumangali scheme, trapping predominantly Dalit girls in bonded labour, in Tamil Nadu's spinning mills. An independent evaluation of the project recommended that it progresses to a second stage to further enhance the impact it could have.

A joint [submission](#) by DSN-UK and READ on bonded labour was also made to the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, contributing to her annual report 2016. The work to push for action to end the Sumangali Scheme also included working with businesses and Ethical Trading Initiative.

The Dalit Solidarity Network - Norway also continued its dialogue and cooperation with the Ethical Trade Initiative in Norway (IEH). Contacts were established with resource persons and organisations in India and the UK that were able to advise the network in establishing a consultancy service for European companies, in order to prevent and respond to caste-based discrimination in their supply chains. A meeting for interested businesses was organised in Oslo in cooperation with the IEH in June.

In Finland, the Dalit Solidarity Network chair was elected to the board of Finnwatch. Finnwatch is an NGO investigating the impacts of business actions in developing countries. DSNFi has been a member organisation of Finnwatch since 2013, and continue to work with Finnwatch to increase the focus on caste-based discrimination in relation to business operations in and with caste-affected countries.

## Raising awareness

In the UK there were widespread media reports on caste-based discrimination and DSN-UK was contacted by the mainstream media in the UK on a number occasions and mentioned in numerous media reports.

The UK network also released the press [statement](#) "UK Government challenged on its non-implementation of law to outlaw caste discrimination" which was widely disseminated.

To spread awareness of the need to combat caste discrimination the Dalit Solidarity Network in Finland participated in the World Village Festival in Helsinki, for the third year in a row. The annual festival was organised by





Kepa, an umbrella organisation of more than 300 Finnish Civil Society Organisations. The festival has around 80,000 visitors every year. In 2016, the main theme of the festival was justice. The network had its own festival tent which was open for visitors who could see the photo exhibition of Jacob Carlsen's pictures on the situation of the Dalits and visitors were given "No to caste discrimination" badges. Volunteers took care of the arrangements and worked in the tent. The weekend included many conversations with the festival visitors and raised awareness of caste discrimination among the Finnish public.

In December 2016, a DSNFi board member was interviewed for a radio programme by Finland's national public service media company, Yle. The programme focused on India and caste discrimination was discussed.

The photo exhibition of Jacob Carlsen's pictures of Dalits was also exhibited in the office building of the congregations of the Lutheran church in Helsinki in December 2016. DSNFi furthermore published more than 50 posts on its Facebook page. The posts provided news and information on caste discrimination and Dalit rights and the DSNFi chair also tweeted on caste discrimination through her own profile.

In Germany, the Dalit Solidarity Network (DSiD) worked together with Amnesty International, who invited DSiD to take part in various presentations and discussions on Dalits with members and other interested groups. Meetings were

also organised in Germany with Indian partners on the issue of caste-based discrimination within the church.

In Belgium, the main activities of the Dalit Solidarity Network Belgium have focused on awareness raising among school teachers in the different French speaking provinces of the country, including a one-month presentation of the IDSN exhibition "260 million reasons to act" in the premises of the diocese in Liège. According to the local organisers, the exhibition attracted a large number of visitors who showed their interest in the issue and their solidarity with the Dalits in South Asia.

Another aspect of DSN-Belgium's activities was the publishing of regular news on the French speaking website [www.dalit.be](http://www.dalit.be) where more than 20 articles have been posted throughout the year, creating feedback both directly and on social media.

The group also welcomed Dalit visitors from South India and organised sharing sessions with these direct witnesses of the Dalit struggle. The special case of Dalit Christians within the Churches in India was discussed, as well as the sufferings of Dalit women exposed to caste, class and gender violence.

In March 2016, a large delegation from across IDSN's global network gathered in Geneva for the IDSN General Assembly. Photo by: IDSN

## Organisation and finances

### General Assembly

With the adoption of revised [statutes](#) and the IDSN [strategy](#) 2015-2018, a new General Assembly came into being. The General Assembly will meet every 3 years – with delegated responsibility to a formalised Board of IDSN.

The General Assembly had its first meeting in March 2016, with a record turnout. New members, Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation – Nepal; Jagaran Media Center – Nepal; Jan Sahas - India and Network of Non-Mainstreamed Marginalised Communities (NNMC), Bangladesh were all present. Also in attendance were representatives from all the national platform members and from the Dalit Solidarity Networks in Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and UK.

We were delighted that many of our International Associates took the time out to attend the meeting. These included Anti-Slavery, IMADR, Lutheran World Federation, Minority Rights Group International and Human Rights Watch (by video link).

### Finances and funding

IDSN maintains government funding from Norway and Denmark, whereas INGO funders of IDSN's work have decreased mainly due to the phasing out of programmes in India. Generally, there is a less conducive funding environment on the global and bilateral scene with cuts in development and human rights funding and shifting priorities. In the second half of the year, fundraising efforts were intensely pursued with global human rights funders to minimise the funding deficit in 2016, and onwards. While prospects for some major grants for IDSN exist, the timeframes are not ideal.

Despite being a well-recognised organisation with a strong membership base, testimonials from top UN and EU officials about efficiency of our work and an excellent external review in 2014, IDSN is challenged due to external circumstances.

In 2016, IDSN with gratitude received funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, HEKS and DanChurchAid.

### Governance

With the adoption of new IDSN statutes in December 2014, the Council decided on a new governance structure with a General Assembly (GM) for members held every three years and a Board in replacement of the Executive Group (EG).

### IDSN Board Members as of 31 December 2016:

- Meena Varma  
Dalit Solidarity Network, UK – Chair
- Paul Divakar  
National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India
- Durga Sob  
Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal
- Sandra Petersen  
Dalit Solidarity Network, Norway
- Einar Tjelle  
Dalit Solidarity Network, Norway
- Henri Tiphagne  
People's Watch, India
- Manuela Ott  
Dalit Solidarity, Germany (DSiD)
- Renu Sijapati  
Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal (FEDO)
- Bhakta Bishwarkarma  
NNDSWO and Dalit NGO Federation, Nepal
- Sono Khangharani  
Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network

### Secretariat

IDSN Executive Director Rikke Nöhrind stepped down from the organisation after 13 years of dedicated service. (See our tribute on page 5).

The Chair of the Board, Meena Varma, has stepped in as Acting Executive.

During 2016, the post of IDSN UN Programme Officer was undertaken by Nina Back Andersen, who holds the position as International Advocacy Officer.

In 2016, we were also fortunate to have Karen Bundgaard Andersen as the Head of Finance and Administration. She was assisted by Peter Soby Pedersen as part-time bookkeeper.

The role of Head of Communications during the year was covered by Maria Brink Schleimann and Kim Wiesener and supported by Danguole Kleinaityte, who is based at DSN-UK and working part-time for IDSN in a number of supportive roles.



## FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2016

### Profit and loss

	2016 DKK	2016 EURO	2015 DKK
Opening balance	428,315.23	57,491.98	246,981.88
<b>Income</b>			
DanChurchAid	200,000.00	26,845.64	250,000.00
Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016	777,940.50	104,421.54	0.00
Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015	0.00	0.00	877,926.44
Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014	0.00	0.00	366,639.14
Membership fees recd. for DSN-DK	10,400.00	1,395.97	32,500.00
Danida	1,000,000.00	134,228.24	1,000,000.00
HEKS	194,848.80	26,154.20	360,085.00
HEKS for 2016	172,308.23	23,128.62	0.00
HEKS extraordinary grant 2015	0.00	0.00	123,660.77
DSiD	92,851.25	12,500.00	0.00
LPW	37,123.50	4,983.02	0.00
European Commission	0.00	0.00	279,067.25
Other Income	10,000.00	1,342.28	193,11
Interest	0.00	0.00	162.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,495,472.28</b>	<b>334,962.72</b>	<b>3,290,234.06</b>
<b>Agio</b>	<b>917.14</b>	<b>123.11</b>	
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>2,554,431.03</b>	<b>342,876.65</b>	<b>3,108,900.71</b>
<b>Result</b>	<b>-58,958.75</b>	<b>-7,913.93</b>	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>369,356.48</b>	<b>49,578.05</b>	<b>428,315.23</b>

### Balance statement

	2016 DKK	2016 EURO	2015 DKK
<b>Assets</b>			
Cash at bank at 31.12.2016	608,617.16	81,693.58	1,907,959.76
<b>Other assets</b>			
Petty cash	1,250.10	167.80	17,738.20
Outstanding accounts	1,670.29	224.20	4,157.91
<b>Total other assets</b>	<b>2,920.39</b>	<b>392.00</b>	<b>21,896.11</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
Balance Master Card account	-13,442.79	-1,804.40	-17,625.34
Compulsory holiday payment fund	-34,957.88	-4,692.33	-212,188.33
HEKS received for 2016	0.00	0.00	172,308.23
Danida received for 2016	0.00	0.00	1,000,000.00
DSiD received for 2017	-92,851.25	-12,500.00	0.00
Outstanding accounts	-100,929.15	-13,547.54	-99,418.75
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>-242,181.07</b>	<b>-32,507.53</b>	<b>-1,501,540.64</b>
<b>Balance carried forward</b>	<b>369,356.48</b>	<b>49,578.05</b>	<b>428,315.23</b>

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 [www.inforeuro.eu](http://www.inforeuro.eu): 7.45

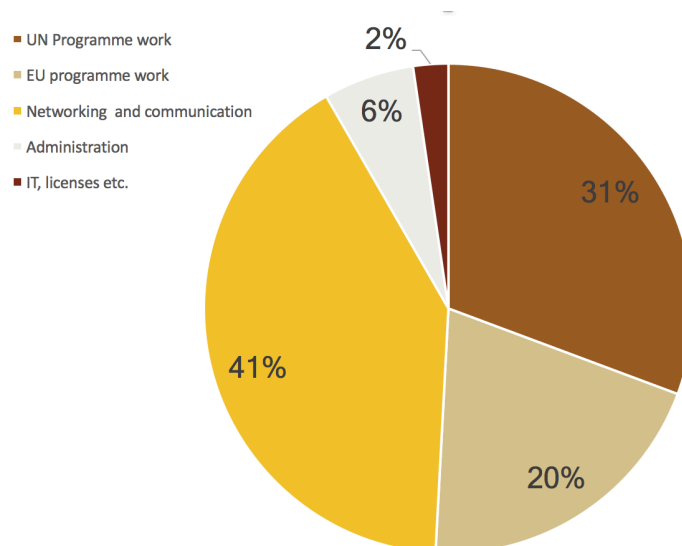
Hence, some discrepancies may appear compared to actual amounts received in Euro.

Notes:

1. Opening balance is in accordance with accounts for 2015
2. Outstanding amount received from European Commission .
3. The total balance includes all IDSNs programmes, and is as such equivalent to the balance carried forward of IDSN.
4. Compulsory and calculated as per the situation on the 31st of December 2016

## EXPENDITURE 2016

### Expenditure



Please find the detailed financial statements for IDSN on [www.idsn.org/financial-statements-2016](http://www.idsn.org/financial-statements-2016)



## International Dalit Solidarity Network

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Denmark  
Phone +45 60 43 34 32  
[info@idsn.org](mailto:info@idsn.org)  
[www.idsn.org](http://www.idsn.org)

### IDS<sup>N</sup> members

#### India

- The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
- The National Federation of Dalit Women
- Navsarjan Trust
- People's Watch
- Jan Sahas

#### Nepal

- Dalit NGO Federation (DNF)
- The Feminist Dalit Organisation
- Nepal Dalit National Social Welfare Organisation (NNDSSWO)
- Jagaran Media Center (JMC)

#### Bangladesh

- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)
- Network of Non-Mainstreamed Marginalized Communities (NNMC)

#### Pakistan

- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN)

### Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe

- Dalit Solidarity Network – UK
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Norway
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Finland
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Denmark
- Solidarité Dalits Belgique (Belgium)
- Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN)
- Dalit Solidarität Deutschland (Germany)

### International Associates

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

### Associates

- The National Confederation of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR)

### Research Affiliates

- Research associates New York University School of Law's Center for Human Rights and Global Justice
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies – Sri Lanka

### Connect with IDS<sup>N</sup>

@ Sign up for updates on:  
[www.idsn.org/newsletter](http://www.idsn.org/newsletter)

f facebook.com/dalitnetwork

t twitter.com/idsnupdates

YouTube youtube.com/idsnvideo

[www.idsn.org](http://www.idsn.org)



The IDS<sup>N</sup> website [www.idsn.org](http://www.idsn.org)

**IDS<sup>N</sup>** was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDS<sup>N</sup> is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe, and organisations in caste-affected countries. IDS<sup>N</sup> 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. IDS<sup>N</sup> 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.