

Dalit Solidarity Network UK Press Release
29 July 2013

The Government has just published their long anticipated timetable for its consultation and implementation of caste discrimination legislation under Clause 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/caste-discrimination-legislation-timetable>

It is disappointing, but sadly not a surprise to note that the proposed timetable will run through to the Summer of 2015 – and probably after the next general election. This unprecedented prolonged consultation means that the Government can repeal the legislation before it is implemented. At this rate the sunset clause – or review of the legislation as agreed for 5 years hence will take place before the legislation is even implemented.

As clearly stated in The Independent article of July 12: ‘Tory Minister accused of renegeing on pledge to end caste discrimination’¹, it certainly appears that the Government’s intention is to kick this very important piece of legislation in to the long grass.

This is despite the assurance from the Minister Helen Grant MP in her response to the article in The Independent where she states:
‘The consultation will focus purely on how we implement the duty, not whether it is implemented. It is vital that we get that right and that requires consultation with all parties. To that end, it is entirely appropriate that I discuss the issue with a wide range of groups and encourage everyone to participate in the consultation’².

Alongside this the Equality and Human Rights Commission have begun to tender for research “to provide baseline information on the extent of caste discrimination, which would form the starting point for a comparative assessment after five years”³. The result of that research is therefore not needed until that comparison comes to be made. But the plan is to delay the consultation until that process is complete.

Discussions with the anti legislation lobby have already taken place – as far as we know at least 3 meetings have taken place with the Minister since the Government agreed to activate the caste clause in the Equality Act. The result of one such meeting was the letter referred to in The Independent article

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-ministers-accused-of-renegeing-on-pledge-to-end-caste-discrimination-8704049.html>

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/letters-keep-caste-politics-out-of-uk-law-8732031.html>

³ http://equalityhumanrights.g2b.info/cgi-gen/profile.pl?action=view_noticev4&other_user=618895¬ice=67234256&type=CompetitiveContractNotice&oid=6405&ctype=2

Why does our current Government fear the anti legislation lobby? Do their votes (and money) count for more than those of the potential victims of caste discrimination?

There is no problem with a consultation period – and in fact it is welcomed. The anti-legislation lobby, led by the Alliance of Hindu Organisations have expressed ‘concerns about the consequences and practicality of [the] legislation and about the impact it may have on communities living within the UK.’⁴ They are concerned that anti-caste discrimination is a direct slight on their religion. It is not – and a well-drafted, fully inclusive consultation would expose this and begin to allay fears.

But why is a consultation period of up to 2 years deemed necessary? This Governments’ own guidelines stipulate a 12 week period to be an optimum.

Again we are assured that the Minister for Equalities will commit to bringing an end to caste discrimination as she states in her response to The Independent article; ‘prejudice and discrimination in any form is unacceptable in modern society – this is as true for caste as it is for race, sex or disability for example – and I remain fully committed to eradicating it.’⁵

If so, why is this Government intent on backtracking on its promises and pandering to a Hindu lobby that seems in its turn intent on making this a Hindu issue – it is not. It is one of basic human rights and we urge our Government to do the right thing – caste discrimination is illegal; it is on the statute books. Please make it enforceable by the end of the year and allow any potential victim recourse to the justice that many thousands clamoured for in Parliament Square in March and April of this year.

⁴ See the Hindu Forum of Britain website: www.hfb.org.uk

⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/letters-keep-caste-politics-out-of-uk-law-8732031.html>