



**DALIT SOLIDARITY
NETWORK UK**
A world without caste discrimination



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REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2016/2017

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A word from the Director

Dear Friends and Supporters of Dalit Solidarity Network UK

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 in the UK, aiming to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We are making a difference and we add our voice to a growing global human rights movement campaigning for change on caste based discrimination.

We are very proud of what we have achieved this year as highlighted in this Review, but we have ongoing challenges, not least the UK Government's unwillingness to implement the agreed legislation to outlaw caste discrimination in the UK. WHY?

Dalit Solidarity Network – UK (DSN-UK) has been campaigning alongside other UK human rights and Dalit organisations, for the introduction of legislation against caste-based discrimination for many years. As it stands, victims do not have adequate opportunities for legal redress within the existing legislation. Despite claims from the anti-legislation lobby that caste discrimination does not exist in the UK, it was the Government-commissioned report that clearly evidenced that it does.

This AGM is our CALL TO ACTION. With the deadline of the caste consultation fast approaching – 18 September 2017, this is the last chance to make sure you have played your part in urging the Government to make caste discrimination illegal in the UK. We may not be able to change the casteist mind-set of some, but we can make sure they change their behaviours! HAVE YOUR SAY – Fill in the [consultation questionnaire](#)

And let us not forget how civil society around the world is shrinking on a daily basis. Tough new regulations in India has unfairly targeted human rights and Dalit organisations. The revocation of foreign funding licenses for organisations defending the rights of disadvantaged groups forms part of a disturbing trend in India. The Indian Constitution and key legislation in India is very clear in protecting the human rights of all people in India including special attention to the most marginalised groups. We live in hope that the Indian Government in India will now also live up to its obligations to implement those rights.

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.

My special thanks to the trustees and patrons, who give so much of their time and energy; and to Danguole (Danni) Kleinaityte, without whose help over the past 2 years, I simply would not be able to do what I do.



Most of all our thanks to you as members and supporters. We couldn't do what we do without you.



Summary

Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN-UK) began in 1998 and now brings together more than 300 organisations and individuals in the UK, who are concerned with caste-based discrimination and aims to link grassroots priorities with international mechanisms and institutions to make an effective contribution to the liberation of those affected by caste discrimination.

DSN-UK registered as a charity in 2004 and since then has continued to grow as an effective campaigning and advocacy organisation working on caste discrimination in the UK. Our membership includes concerned individuals, development agencies, trades unions, journalists and academics.

We are working towards equality and social justice for Dalits both in the UK and worldwide in other caste-affected countries. We are a small pioneering headquarters organisation in the UK, working jointly with other likeminded groups, building strategic alliances to maximise advocacy opportunities and build a stronger network of organisations. Our aims are to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We raise awareness and support Dalit demands for justice – through an effective advocacy programme.

In 2015, DSN-UK strategy and objectives were reviewed and updated by the trustees and the Director. Our new five objectives, as agreed by the DSN Board in May 2016, will guide you through this report:

1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage with the Dalit cause worldwide;
2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains;
3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions;
4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination;
5. DSN-UK seen as an expert and respected voice on caste-based discrimination.

1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage with the Dalit cause worldwide

1.1 All Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits [APPG]

In May 2016, the APPG for Dalits held its Annual General Meeting [AGM]. Yasmin Qureshi, Labour MP for Bolton South East, was appointed as the new Chair of the APPG for Dalits. Lord Harries of Pentregarth was re-elected Co-Chair of the Group. The AGM was followed by an event '[Dalit Rights are Human Rights](#)', jointly hosted by the APPG on Human Rights. The event focused both on Dalit rights in the UK and globally.

In July 2016, Lord Harries called for a [debate in the House of Lords](#), asking Her Majesty's Government on the planned steps to implement anti-caste discrimination legislation. Speaking on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, Baroness Thornton, ended the debate saying: *'I agree that this is an issue which the new Administration, led by the new Prime Minister, who herself was Minister for Women and Equalities in 2010-12, will need to consider afresh, and I am sure that they will'*.

1.2 Caste legislation in the UK

After receiving the same 'holding' response from Her Majesty's Government [HMG] in the July 2016 debate at the House of Lords, DSN-UK instructed well known solicitors, Mishcon de Reya, acting on a pro bono basis, to commence Judicial Review proceedings to challenge the non-implementation of the legislation to outlaw caste discrimination. The [pre-action protocol](#) was sent to the Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening MP, under whose remit falls the Minister for Equalities and Women. As a result of the letter, HMG agreed to launch the much delayed public consultation by the end of 2016.

In February 2017, Mishcon de Reya, sent another follow up letter to HMG asking for the reasons for the ongoing delay of the consultation. The letter stated that their client (DSN-UK) was well within their rights to launch the Judicial Review as HMG had not fulfilled its agreed actions.



Finally, on 28 March 2017, HMG announced the launch of the consultation on [Caste and the Equality Act](#), proposing two possible options:

- i) Prohibiting caste discrimination through **developing case-law**;
- ii) Prohibiting caste discrimination by **specifying caste in the Equality Act**.

It was clear that the terms of the consultation had significantly shifted. HMG was no longer asking 'how' the legislation could be implemented, but 'whether' it should be implemented at all.

Following the announcement of the caste consultation, DSN-UK convened a meeting with some key UK stakeholders to agree on a plan to mobilise supporters and communities to ensure widespread and inclusive

engagement throughout the country, and to counteract the anti-legislation lobby that had a significant and undue influence on the drafting of the consultation and the questions.

1.3 Other Parliamentary work

DSN-UK actively participated in a number of relevant key events in the UK.

In anticipation of the Government's caste consultation the Indian Forum on British Media organised an event in Parliament on 23 November 2016. 'Caste discrimination and the UK law' was attended by DSN-UK and a number of its members. The organisers were open from the start about being against the legislation and this was also the position of MP Bob Blackman, who stepped in as the event's chairperson. The debate became more balanced with the panel, which included 4 pro and 4 anti-legislation speakers. It became apparent during the course of debate that the majority of the audience favoured the legislation.



Debate in Parliament, photo credit: Indian Forum on British Media

DSN-UK actively engaged in the UK's Universal Periodic Review process. Danni attended an event at the Houses of Parliament, organised by the APPG on the United Nations, the APPG on the Rule of Law, the APPG on Human Rights and the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The discussions covered the UPR recommendations, civil society's engagement and the potential impact on the human rights situation in the UK, as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

On 29 March 2017, DSN-UK Director, Meena Varma, was invited to a closed Parliamentary event to meet with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, which was organised by the APPG on Human Rights and the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The discussions covered a variety of topics, from Brexit to global human rights and how the UK should address the UPR. Meena was able to thank the High Commissioner and his office for raising the issue of caste-based discrimination and the need to address it.

Meena also met with the Economic Advisor on Female Economic Empowerment from Department for International Development [DfID] on Business and Women's Economic Empowerment and was asked for her advice on their [Work and Opportunities for Women \(WOW\)](#) programme, which aims to improve women's access to economic opportunities in supply chains and enable DFID and the UK economic development investments to deliver better economic outcomes for women. As India will be one of the target countries, Meena was consulted on how to address discrimination against Dalit women.

2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains

2.1 The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)

DSN-UK Director, Meena Varma, stepped down from the Board and her role as Treasurer of ETI in December 2016, where she had served for the past 8 years. The role involved the strategic oversight of ETI's management accounts and reporting to the ETI Board. DSN-UK continues to play an active role in the NGO Caucus and directly relevant programmes.



DSN-UK also remains a key member of the core Tamil Nadu Multi Stakeholder Advisory Group and is the lead NGO in the Rajasthan Stone Group, which aims to build a sustainable model and framework that can help this sector address core labour rights issues from processing yards to quarries. DSN-UK continues to provide advice on caste-based discrimination to the both groups and a number of companies with other active supply chains in South Asia.

2.2 DSN-UK and Rights Education and Development Centre [READ] project on Sumangali

At the end of 2013 DSN-UK partnered with Rights Education and Development Centre [READ] in a programme of work, funded by Textile Recycling for Aid and Development [TRAID], aimed at *Ending the Sumangali Scheme*. Although, in November 2016, the project came to a formal end, it was extended to April 2017 due to remaining funds, as a result of some very favourable exchange rates for the first 2.5 years.



In March 2017, DSN-UK and READ once again made a joint submission to the Special Rapporteur [SR] on slavery. Her thematic report for 2017 is on access to justice for victims of slavery. Our submission focused on remedy for the victims of the *Sumangali scheme*.

In June 2016, Meena also spoke at an International Labour Organisation's event, highlighting bonded labour and the *Sumangali scheme*.

2.3 Other Corporate work

DSN-UK Director continues to advise companies with supply chains in South Asia, and in India in particular, as a key sourcing area of the need to address caste-based discrimination if they are to address their labour rights obligations throughout their supply chains and reach the most vulnerable, marginalised and often invisible workers.

In April 2017, Meena was invited to attend and speak at a two day workshop [Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Modern Slavery](#) organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the Houses of Parliament, where she highlighted the issue of caste-based bonded labour. Meena shared an example of the *Sumangali scheme* and provided recommendations to businesses and governments on how to improve the situation. Participants were MPs from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia and New Zealand.

3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions

3.1 At the United Nations

In August 2016, the UK was reviewed under the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [CERD]. DSN-UK together with International Dalit Solidarity Network [IDSN] made a [submission](#) prior to the review highlighting issues of caste-based



discrimination in the UK. DSN-UK Director made a formal presentation to the Committee and other NGOs in Geneva prior to the interactive dialogue. She highlighted the importance of the caste legislation in the UK and the frustration with the delays in implementing it. At the end of the review, the CERD Concluding Observations included a recommendation to implement the legislation outlawing caste-based discrimination in the UK without any further delay.

In September 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on Contemporary Forms of Slavery [SR] presented her [annual report](#), focused on debt bondage to the Human Rights Council. It highlighted DSN-UK and READ [joint submission](#) to the SR, where we share our first-hand knowledge of debt bondage in India, Tamil Nadu, under the *sumangali* scheme. Also, in September 2016, DSN-UK jointly with IDSN made a [submission](#) to the Universal Periodic Review on caste-based discrimination in the UK.

In November 2016, Meena was in Geneva, at the Forum on Minority Issues [the Forum], which provides space for a constructive dialogue for a range of stakeholders, but most importantly placing civil society representatives at the centre of the discussions. In 2016 the Forum's [theme](#) analysed the situation of minorities in humanitarian crises. The issue that was highlighted by IDSN in its report published in 2013 "[Equality in Aid: addressing caste discrimination in humanitarian response](#)". At the Forum statements were made by IDSN members from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In November 2016, Meena also attended a CERD consultation with civil society organisations. The consultation aimed to reflect on the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination achievements in combating racial discrimination and to seek civil society's views on how to improve and enhance CERD engagement with civil society for greater impact on the ground. DSN-UK, IDSN and Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization [NNSWOW] submitted a [joint response](#) with concrete suggestions in advance to the consultation.



CERD consultation with civil society UN Palais de Nations Room XX

In April 2017, as part of the IDSN delegation, Meena attended UPR training organised by the UPR Info, in Geneva, also India and the UK Pre-sessions and a number of lobbying meetings. Meena shared DSN-UK recommendations on addressing caste-based discrimination in the UK stressing the need for specific anti-discrimination legislation with a range of country missions. Ramesh Nathan, General Secretary of the National Dalit Movement for Justice in India worked alongside Meena and made recommendations to the states to raise caste-based discrimination issues at the UPR for India.

DSN-UK Director was invited and joined a roundtable event with the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery by Anti Slavery International to highlight the issues of caste and slavery and its entrenched nature.

3.2 Asia Dalit Rights Forum

In February 2017, Meena chaired a high-level panel of speakers at a [‘Global Parliamentarians’ Conference on discrimination based on work and descent including caste’](#) in Nepal, Kathmandu, organised by Asian



The Global Parliamentarians’ Conference, Kathmandu

Parliamentarian’s Forum on Dalit Concerns and Asia Dalit Rights Forum. The panel consisted of Katia Chirizzi, Acting Deputy of Regional Office for South Asia at OHCHR; Henri Tiphagne, Chairperson of Working Group on Human Rights; and Jerald Joseph, Commissioner at Malaysia Human Rights Commission. Their presentations contributed to a discussion on strategies, achievements of the past and opportunities, and tasks for the future in addressing discrimination based on work and descent, including caste.

The conference was attended by over 80 participants, including politicians, Dalit activists and diplomats. At the end of the conference all participants signed the [Kathmandu declaration](#) of solidarity pledging to end caste-based discrimination and untouchability, and work towards development and progress of those affected by it *'within the parameters of equality and justice, equity and inclusion'*.

3.3 Minority Rights Group International [MRGI]

Meena is currently Vice Chair of the MRGI Council and Chair of their Management Committee. The Council oversaw the approval of a [new MRGI strategy 2017 - 2020](#)

Objective 1: Countering religious and ethnic persecution, a root cause of forced migration;

Objective 2: Promoting inclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in sustainable development and society.



3.4 Anti Slavery International



Anti Slavery is a member of the International Dalit Solidarity Network and this year, it published its [Anti Slavery Charter](#). DSN-UK and IDSN are both signatories

4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination

During the last year DSN-UK contributed to several different [media](#) outlets highlighting caste-based discrimination in the UK and worldwide. Those include [Liberation](#) (long established NGO in the UK) December magazine issue, celebrating International Human Rights Day; the BBC Asian Network Lunchtime programme in October 2016 emphasising again the need for caste legislation; a joint article with Aidan McQuade, Anti-Slavery International Director, published by Thomson Reuters Foundation, highlighting that any move to tackle slavery in supply chains in India must first address caste and related discrimination; and I News article published in November 2016, titled *'Why hasn't Britain done more to outlaw the forced labour of "untouchable" Indians?'*

Meena was also filmed for a documentary highlighting caste-based discrimination in the UK, which is yet to be broadcasted.

By March 2017, DSN-UK Facebook page reached over 2,470 followers and @DSNUK Twitter followers reach over 6630.

5. DSN-UK seen as an expert respected voice on caste based discrimination

During the last year DSN-UK has sent regular updates and 4 news updates (DSN-UK newsletter). DSN-UK invested time in developing and strengthening relationships with supportive organisations, individuals and networks, including with Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe. These include Germany, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands. DSN-UK also hosted a meeting with Jan Sahas founder, Ashif Shaikh. Ashif spoke about the organisation and some of the challenges that Dalit movement in India is currently facing.

In December 2016, DSN-UK Director had a first meeting with the Director of Policy, Director of Programmes and Press Officer at Liberty. They have pledged to support DSN-UK in getting the UK legislation implemented and galvanise their members to take part in the consultation.

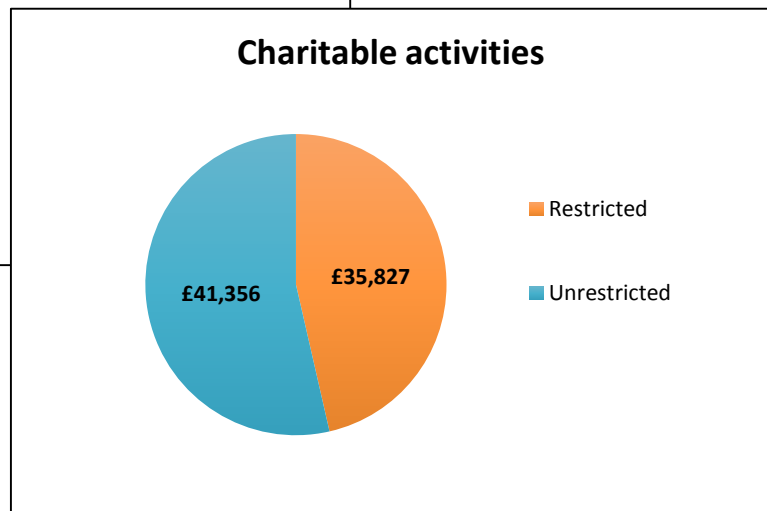
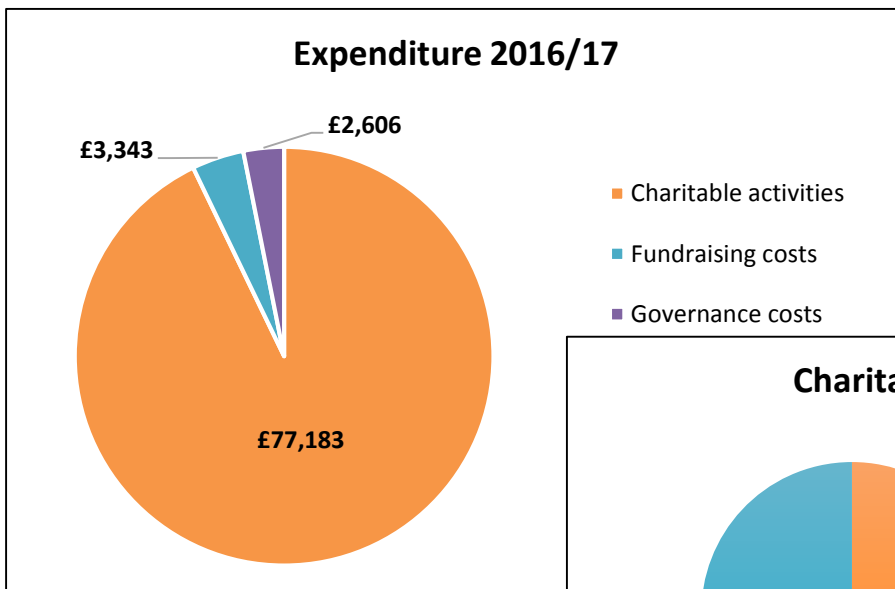
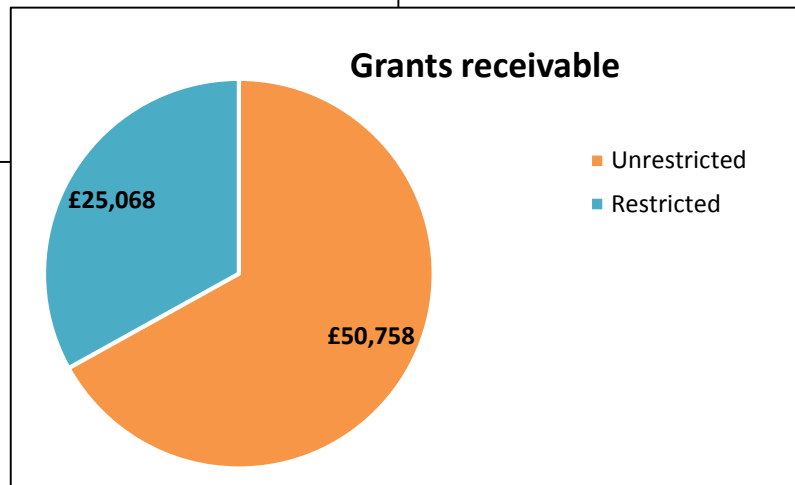
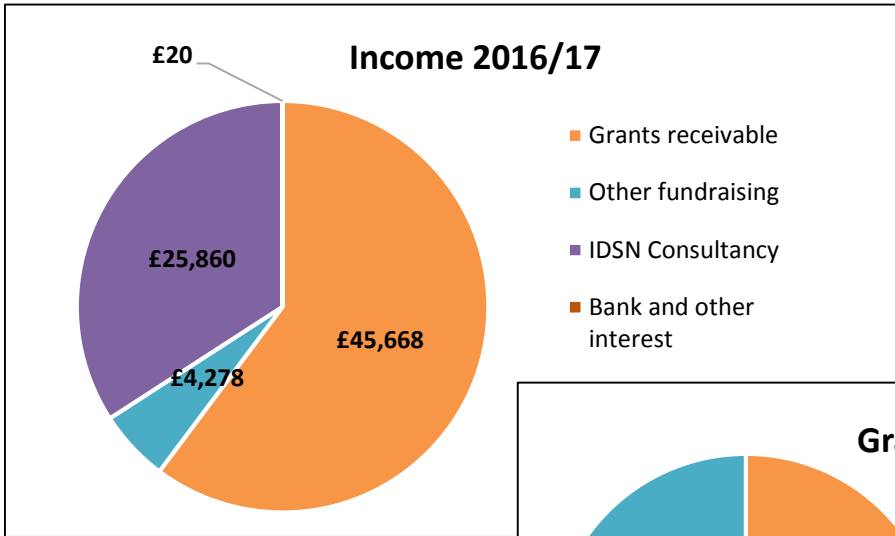
DSN-UK continued to take part in the BOND Group on Caste and Development meetings. Currently the regular members are Anti Slavery, Christian Aid, DSN-UK, Karuna Trust, Village Service Trust and Voice of Dalit International.

In February 2017, Christian Network against Caste Discrimination and Voice of Dalit International held a [discussion](#) on "UK Caste Consultation and Christian Responsibility" at the Houses of Parliament. Meena was invited to speak on caste-based discrimination in the UK and worldwide.

Highlights and challenges of the year

- In July 2016, DSN-UK instructed Mishcon de Reya to start Judicial Review proceedings to [challenge](#) the UK Government over the non-implementation of the promised legislation to outlaw caste discrimination in the UK. The action was supported by Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance, CasteWatch UK and the National Secular Society.
- As a result of the pre-action protocol, in September 2016 the Government promised to announce the consultation process on caste legislation in the Equality Act 2010 – by the end of 2016.
- READ and DSN-UK joint submission outlined in the Special Rapporteur's on slavery report on 'bonded labour', presented in September 2016.
- DSN-UK made a submission to the CERD in preparation for the UK review in August 2016 and actively participated in the review, securing a recommendation to implement legislation outlawing caste discrimination in the UK without further delay.
- [Caste in Great Britain and Equality Law](#) consultation formally announced on 28 March 2017.
- DSN-UK Director met with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.
- In April 2017 DSN-UK convened the first key stakeholders meeting to agree on a plan to mobilise for the caste consultation in the UK.
- DSN-UK Director gave several [interviews](#) on caste discrimination related issues in the UK, including the BBC Asian Network, and I News.
- DSN-UK Facebook page reached over 2,470 followers and [@DSNUK](#) Twitter followers reach over 6630.

Accounts at a Glance



Thank you

Anti Slavery International
CasteWatch UK
Ethical Trading Initiative
Evan Cornish Foundation
Farthing Trust
International Dalit Solidarity Network
Karuna Trust
Methodist Church in Britain
Minority Rights Group International
St Clare and St Francis Trust
Three Oaks Trust
TRAID
Village Services Trust
Wyndham Trust

And again special thanks to all the trustees and patrons, members and supporters of the Network who give up their time to attend meetings, rallies and other events.