

End of Year Newsletter

Dear Members, Supporters and Friends,

Welcome to the End of Year News Update for 2018. In this issue we have collated the latest news and events in the UK and overseas. Sadly, tackling the subject of caste-based discrimination has taken a back seat for politicians and the media, in favour of the all-pervasive Brexit. Nevertheless, we continue to make plans to fight the repeal, with the amazing support of other Dalit networks.

DSN-UK News:

- This year's AGM in October was a well-attended event, with an edited version of the documentary *Caste Aside* and a presentation by David Mosse on the Public Consultation. There was a great session afterwards about possible strategies to get the fight for caste discrimination to be legislated against. Many thanks to all those who attended and provided ideas.
- The APPG for Dalits was held in November, organised by Meena, our Director. It was disappointing that no MPs turned up, but we were fortunate to have a good turn-out from the House of Lords and other stakeholders. There is now a collective impetus to make sure that this issue is not forgotten about, whether it be by challenging the remit of the consultation and results, or by reaching out to other human rights groups to garner their help.
- Despite the claim by some that caste discrimination does not exist in the UK, a recent discussion on BBC Asian Network (including some words from Meena) included the stories of several victims. Although we have made some progress in the public domain, there is still much to be done to protect people in the private domain.
- Caste not a protected characteristic

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International News

- Following on from MEP Jean Lambert's question about IDSN's ten-year battle to gain consultative status at the UN, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, stated that, "A critical mass of

members of the NGO Committee is hostile to civil society interests, particularly in sensitive areas such as caste discrimination” but that they are open to discussing the case further. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, David Gilmour, also pressed the case in a [statement to the HRC](#).

- At the [39th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council \(HRC\)](#) held in September Michele Bachelet, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN, gave her first speech. While she praised India for having decriminalised same sex relations, IDSN issued a joint statement with the Minority Rights Group (MRG) urging the Rapporteur to continue monitoring caste discrimination. A joint statement was also made with International Movement against All forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) regarding the practice of Manual Scavenging and the number of Dalits engaged in this illegal work.
- The EU has once again provoked disappointment by failing to [put human rights issues](#) centre stage in their statement to strengthen cooperation and partnership with India. The EU’s May 2018 Annual report on human rights in democracy barely mentions caste discrimination, no doubt wary of the sensitivity of the issue, but they are misguided if they think that ‘modernisation’ will solve this problem.

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India

- Despite the fact that manual scavenging (cleaning out sewers, cesspits and latrines by hand) has been banned in India for the last 25 years, the practise still continues, with an estimated 700,000 still carrying out this highly dangerous work. And while the government seem to be concentrating on ending the practice of [open defecation](#), some new technology coming through via not for profit organisations and engineers might be set to change things: look out for the ‘[Hope Machine](#)’, the ‘[sewer croc](#)’ and the ‘bandicoot’!
- Sadly, it seems as though the situation for Dalits still has a long way to go in India. On October 23 [a thirteen-year-old girl](#) was beheaded for refusing the sexual advances of a member of a dominant caste in a village in Tamil Nadu. There has been division over whether the case is casteist or sexist in nature – though there are those who argue that it is both.

- A so-called ‘honour killing’ of a Christian Dalit who had married an upper-class Hindu woman, murdered in front of his pregnant wife, hit headlines in September. A couple found tossed in a river in Tamil Nadu were also victims of the disapproval of ‘inter-caste’ marriage. Both killings were organised by the women’s fathers.

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Nepal

- Following on from the sixth periodic review of Nepal of the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), a number of recommendations have been made, including better access to education, health and lifting the ban against women seeking work abroad.

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Pakistan

- Pakistan has been in the news a fair amount following the Asia Bibi case, where her sentence of execution for blasphemy has now been overturned. While many have concentrated on religious discrimination, her persecution has also been a case of caste discrimination, often practised against Christian Pakistanis.
- Having already largely ignored the recommendations from two rounds of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Pakistan continues to deny that caste discrimination exists. A joint statement by a number of Dalit rights groups (including IDSN), has urged the country to tackle the rising number of abductions of Dalit women and girls for the purpose of forced conversion to Islam and marriage, disappearances and the murder and persecution of Dalit rights activists.

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Nigeria

- And lastly some good news – Nigeria has made massive steps forward in confronting the problem of caste discrimination against the Osu, a group considered to be inferior to the Ndiala people. Rather than being motivated by the government or religious organisations, the traditional

rulers of Igboland have declared that the practice will become illegal on 28th December 2018.
