

Spring Newsletter 2019

Dear Members, Supporters and Friends,

Welcome to the Spring Newsletter 2019. In this issue we have collated the latest news and events in the UK and overseas. So much legislation has been put on the backburner due to the uncertainties surrounding Brexit. However, we continue to battle for caste-based discrimination to be acknowledged legally and for awareness to be increased.

DSN-UK News:

- In January of this year, DSN convened another meeting of the UK campaign stakeholders, following on from the APPG back in November. As a result of the discussions, the group decided that we would provide a clear and concise brief on the Guidance document; log cases with the EHRC; get the APPG to ascertain how it will input/influence the Guidance document; get on-line harassment included; and consult with ACAS and the TUC. DSN will take on the role of garnering support from International NGOs.
- As part of the Homeworkers Worldwide Project, Meena attended a stakeholder meeting in Chennai to work on the leather supply chain. The report will be presented to the Ethical Trading Initiative. Although there was some discussion over whether a zero discrimination policy included caste, it was admitted that it did play a 'special' role in India.
- DSN-UK have played a role in the ETI Caste Guidance document, which is now in its final stages. Hopefully both DSN and IDSN will be able to make use of it in their work as we move forward.
- We are continuing to grow our network, including a US organisation called Transparantem and ARISA Advocacy and Research in South Asia (formerly the India Committee of the Netherlands), meetings with academics from Japan, and an increase of subscribers to our Twitter feed.

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International News

- Congratulations to IDSN on a very successful [General Assembly](#) at the end of last year. Discussions were focused on IDSN's three coming strategic priorities – Dalit Women and Gender Justice; Equality and Participation; and Business and Human Rights. A new five-year strategy has been announced, focusing on the UN Sustainable Development

Goals, growing the IDSN network and building on IDSN's media outreach work.

- On 5 February, a new [IDSN Ambassadors Group](#) was launched, aimed at ensuring that caste discrimination continues to have a place on the global human rights agenda. The group consists of academics and experts on the issue, including DSN-UK patron Aidan McQuade.
- UN secretary general Antonio Guterres has received a letter signed by over 90 organisations, 50 institutions and a number of intellectuals requesting that he intervene in the [detainment of Anand Teltumbde](#) in India. Accused of involvement in the violence in Bhim Koregaon in 2017 and links to Naxalites, the author, professor and activist's supporters have protested that he was not even present at the event and that the police have fabricated letters. Teltumbde is widely considered to have been arrested in a move against freedom of speech, having outspoken views about the caste system.
- In the US, Brandeis University based in Boston and Waltham, Massachusetts, looks set to become the [first major University](#) to ban caste bias and discrimination on campus. Although still waiting for final approval from the President, the private non-sectarian university hopes to bring in the change this autumn. Larry Simon, an expert on caste and a professor at the institute's Heller School of Social Policy and Management, has spearheaded this campaign. Fingers crossed that Brandeis will set an example for other educational centres across America.

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Bangladesh

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced at a scholarship ceremony for 500 students from small ethnic groups living in the flatlands that she intends to [promote an egalitarian society](#). "Everyone in this country will enjoy equal rights regardless of their religion, race, ethnicity or caste. This is our goal and we will meet our goal," said Hasina.

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India

- Dalit rights have been eroded by the Central government's recently passed Bill that provides [a 10% reservation to impoverished Indians from the General category](#). The reservation system, whereby Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities have reserved places in government and education, was set up to try and balance out the severe discrimination they faced for centuries. The attempt by the government to alter this situation belittles the suffering and hardship that Dalits and Adivasis have endured, and appears to be an attempt to move away from the on-going battle to rebalance power in the caste system to one of economic priority.
- Back in August the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a circular 'advising' media outlets to use the [term 'Scheduled Caste' instead of Dalit](#). In an attempt to overturn the circular a Public Interest Litigation petition was launched but in February it was dismissed by the Supreme Court. While the Ministry has argued that the term 'Dalit' is derogatory, advocates have stated that it has been chosen by the community itself, and that this is an attempt to remove the issue of caste from the public consciousness.
- The BJP, India's ruling party, has [set a budget that aims to woo Dalits](#) but does little to mitigate the increase in violence against them. Although the Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Castes (AWSC) has seen a 35.6 per cent increase, it still fails to make up for the deficit of the last 5 budgets, and the fine print shows a decrease in key funds. Perhaps most telling is that while Rs 700 crore has been allocated for protection of cows, only Rs 147 crore has been earmarked for the protection of Dalit and Adivasi women through the implementation of PCR and Prevention of Atrocities Act. It is a truly terrible state of affairs when the lives of cows trump those of women.
- The recent publication of '[Criminal Justice in the Shadow of Caste](#)', prepared by Dalit movements and based on National Crime Records Bureau data, shows a disproportionate number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are currently being held in prison. The report further highlights the discrimination shown in how their cases are handled, often drawn out by the police delaying investigations, and the disturbing number of retaliatory cases brought against [Dalit victims by the perpetrators](#).
- At the end of last year, we reported on a number of sewer cleaning machines that are due to be introduced in India, in the hope that it would reduce the dangers inherent in the job. However, it has been announced that rather than the government providing the equipment, [sewer workers will be required to purchase the machinery](#). After a down payment of

10% (4 lakh, approximately £4,300), they will then have to pay the remainder of the sum to the government at an interest rate of 11.1% over a period of 5 years. This is simply beyond what the vast majority of Dalits can afford.

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Mauritania

- The Committee to Protect Journalists has written to the Mauritanian Embassy in Washington about their concern for [blogger Cheikh Ould Mohamed](#), who was arrested following an article that criticized the Mauritanian caste system. Originally sentenced to death for apostasy in 2014, his sentence was commuted to two years. But despite having served his time, President Abdel Aziz stated that “a large majority of the population opposes it. His release may pose problems of security to our country. For this reason, we are keeping him until we find a solution.” Although slavery was abolished in 1981 and criminalized in 2007, many Haratin are still locked in the system.

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Nepal

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has stated that the government has [failed to improve human rights](#) in the country, with Nepal’s rights body drawing attention to the neglect in confronting the issues facing marginalised communities, Dalits and women. Despite having formulated a national action plan relating to human rights, for which Nepal has been commended, many of the 2017-18 report’s recommendations have not been implemented.

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