

Summer News Update 2019

Dear Members, Supporters and Friends,

Welcome to the Summer News Update 2019. In this issue we have collated the latest news and events in the UK and overseas. The race for the Tory Party leadership is over with Boris Johnson the clear winner; Brexit still looms over us all and the government has been slow to tackle any of the outstanding issues in civil society over the past several months.

However, just because parliament appears to have stood still for some time, doesn't mean that we are!

DSN-UK News

- *Despite considerable input from stakeholders following a meeting in January, and with notes from the APPG for Dalits, the government has yet to publish its Guidance document on Caste-based Discrimination. DSN-UK was responsible for collating the comments from the UK pro-legislation stakeholder group in April and reporting back to the Government Equalities Office. This, however, is not necessarily bad news, as the government are theoretically unable to repeal the duty to include 'caste' until the document has been published – [as announced by Penny Mordaunt MP in July 2018](#).*
- *To prepare for any last minute announcement of repeal, the APPG for Dalits held a meeting with pro-legislation campaigners to discuss possible actions we might undertake if this worst case scenario occurs.*
- *We have been working hard on the [Ethical Trading Initiative's](#) Base Code Guidance on Caste in Global Supply Chains. Following on from [BOND's Caste and Development report](#), this will be another important advocacy tool to highlight the issues of caste-based discrimination to international businesses.*
- *We continue to provide support to the Dalit community, including a woman who feared being deported back to India after the abuse she suffered as a member of a Scheduled Caste.*
- *Watch out for our updated website coming soon! We are currently redeveloping the site to make it easier to navigate and to bring it up to date. Meanwhile our Twitter feed continues to grow, and we are still assisting the media on the issues of caste – you may have caught Meena's contribution to a BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme back in April.*

International News

- *[Caste and Gender Justice event at the UN Human Rights Council](#)
Dalit human rights defenders and UN experts raise concerns over intersectional caste and gender discrimination and its adverse impact on access to human*

rights, at the Dalit Women and Gender Justice side-event at the UN Human Rights Council's 41st Session in Geneva.

- [#NoCasteLeftBehind at the European Development Days](#)
An IDSN delegation with Dalit human rights defenders from Nepal, India and Bangladesh made its mark on the European Development Days 2019, with a stand in the Global Village and participation in key sessions. The event also saw the launch of IDSN's #NoCasteLeftBehind initiative with participants joining hands to fight caste discrimination.
- The UN has received a [joint submission](#) in advance of the adoption of the list of issues to be brought up at the 126th session for the state party of India by IDSN and the National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ). The report has recommended nine questions to be asked at the session in July, including whether the State party can explain the discrepancy between the rise of crimes against Scheduled Castes and the low rates of conviction of these crimes, despite the enactment of the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. [Human Rights Watch](#) has also made a submission with recommendations on the Protection of Marginalised Groups, amongst other topics.
- Well done to the EU for including caste in their [EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action](#). It is specified in the guidelines that the term 'descent', 'includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status', and that the EU should, 'Participate actively in UN mechanisms and processes dedicated to general and specific discrimination related issues such as ... discrimination based on caste (work and descent)'.
- Back in April IDSN supported the [Dakar Consultation on Global Partnership and Joint Actions](#) in Addressing Discrimination based on Work and Descent – DWD, Untouchability, Contemporary Forms of Slavery and Analogous Forms of Discrimination, held in Senegal. The aim was to ensure joint actions and strategies throughout the globe to combat caste discrimination, and resulted in a number of new initiatives and a published [Declaration](#) and summary report.
- Oxfam India has released a report on [the state of employment in India](#) and the discrimination faced by Dalits and women, which builds on the first report published in February 2019, on employment inequality. This excellent paper is full of illuminating facts and figures, among them that in 2015, the Scheduled Castes earned only 56% of upper caste earnings and that they receive 15% lower wages than other workers in both public and private sectors.

The Gambia

- The [National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia](#) (NHRC) has strongly condemned the discrimination of so-called slaves by so-called nobles in various parts of The Gambia. In its press release issued on Tuesday 18th June 2019 in the

wake of a series of disturbances particularly in the Upper River Region amongst the Sarahule tribe, the NHRC described such discrimination as unlawful. The statement on caste-based discrimination calls 'on all community leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders, elders, civil and public servants and the citizenry to be very wary and to desist from making discriminatory statements and or engaging in discriminatory practices.'

India

- The biggest news coming from India is the re-election of [Narendra Modi](#) and the BJP. What this means for Dalits and Adivasis remains to be seen, but reports suggest that the BJP's anti-Dalit mentality is causing problems in Uttar Pradesh already. The Congress hit out at the BJP-ruled regional government over 'rising' incidents of atrocities on women and Dalits in the state.
- It is easy to forget that caste-based discrimination occurs within the [Muslim community in India](#) as well. The recent government elections have highlighted the issue, where of the 7,500 elected representatives from the first to the fourteenth Lok Sabha, 400 were Muslims. But while the upper caste (Ashraf) community, which make up 2.1% of India's population, had representation of 4.2%, the Dalit community make up 11.4% of the population but only had representation of 0.8%.
- Facebook just can't seem to get it right when it comes to India. Equality Labs have reported that the company has been remiss in taking down hate speech, [13% of which has been casteist in nature](#). Despite being the company's biggest growth market, with over 300 million accounts already, they support only 8 of the 22 languages spoken in India and have failed to understand the nuances and cultural contexts involved. Relying on volunteer translators, posts take 48 hours to remove, but are usually reposted within a day, and have already incited violence.
- At last the issue of sewage workers in India has been highlighted by the [BBC in the UK](#), following the tragic deaths of seven people during the cleaning of a hotel's septic tank in Gujarat. However, no mention has been made of the fact that the vast majority of those in this line of work are Dalits, with barriers blocking their ability to find alternative employment. As a major broadcaster, it is a shame that they have not used this platform to raise awareness of such a crucial issue.
- Despite the tireless work to end caste-discrimination, violence continues in India. In Uttarakhand a young Dalit was [beaten to death](#) by upper-caste men for eating dinner near them at a wedding; in Puri four Dalit families who had refused to [wash clothes for free](#) were denied entry to a shelter during Cyclone Fani and one of their houses razed to the ground; in Gujarat an upper-caste legislator brutally [beat and tortured a Dalit](#) for buying a luxury car; and in New Delhi, one man was killed and three injured in a '[cow-lynching](#)' mob attack while they were skinning a dead ox. Sadly, this is by no means the all the

incidents that have occurred over the last quarter, but indicates that there is still a massive amount to do to end the mindset of casteism.

Mauritania

- In spring we reported on the blogger [Cheikh Ould Mohamed](#), who was sentenced to death for apostasy when he spoke out about discrimination against Haratines, but then had his sentence commuted to two years in prison. Despite having served more than his sentence, he remains incarcerated. On a more positive note, anti-slavery activist [Biram Ould Dah Ould Abei](#), having been arrested for a similar offence, took 9.5% of the vote in the recent presidential elections, suggesting that there is a platform for change in the country.

Nepal

- In rural Nepal caste discrimination appears to be rife, despite over 50 years of anti-caste discrimination laws. In [Bajura](#) at least five separate water spouts had to be constructed in villages, as Dalits were being forbidden to use the ones that were already in place. Although non-Dalits claim that this is for 'convenience', there is little doubt that the harassment and abuse that Dalits suffered when trying to use the communal taps lead to this solution, which while easing the immediate problem, does little to end the division between villagers.
- In March over 50 members of the [Kami, Damai and Sarki castes](#) from Nepal and India came together in Siliguri, a trade town in sub-Himalayan West Bengal, and shared with each other stories of oppression, discrimination and everyday casteism. Consequently, the group, which includes members from Bhutan, have formed an organisation which aims to fight caste-based discrimination against Nepali Dalits in all three countries, and conduct research on and document Dalit history and legacy. We wish them the best of luck in their endeavours.
- Uma Devi Badi, a Nepali MP, scaled a government gate semi-naked in protest against the treatment of her caste, the [Badi](#). A remarkable woman, who was forced out of her village for marrying a Brahmin, she set up a hostel for Badi children with her husband and organised peaceful rallies to highlight the lack of education for Badi children and the sexual exploitation of women. She said that she had 'no other option' but to use this unusual protest in order to get the government to listen to the continuing plight of her people.

Sri Lanka

- President Maithripala Sirisena has stated that [ending caste discrimination in the North](#) is a bigger challenge than building national unity and reconciliation. Although 90% of the land in the area has been released, the higher castes have claimed the valuable terrain while the lower castes have been left with land of little worth. As a

result, the president has asked help from academics and experts to try and resolve the problem.

USA

- *In May, South Asian rights groups in the US had the opportunity to inform [Congress lawmakers](#) that upper-caste Hindus in America were discriminating against lower-caste Hindus in both education and at work, bringing up the sensitive issue for the first time before the country's representatives. According to a study by Equality Labs, South Asian Americans in the US are a major ethnic group of about 4.3 million people who have their origins in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan and have mostly settled in California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois and the Carolinas. The session was intended to open 'pathways for advocacy around this issue' and to seek policy intervention.*