

DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK UK and Minority Rights Group International

PRESS RELEASE:

NEPALESE DALIT WOMEN SPEAK OF VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AT HOUSE OF COMMONS MEETING 28TH NOVEMBER 2006

On Tuesday 28 November at an historic meeting in the House of Commons, London, Nepalese Dalit Manju Badi, from an 'untouchable' caste branded as prostitutes, gave first hand testimony on the extent and depth of the violence and discrimination Dalit women face in everyday Nepalese life. Dalits are considered the lowest of the low in the brutal caste system that rigidly divides South East Asian society. There are approximately 1.2 million Dalit women in Nepal - around 12.3 percent of the female population.

Manju Badi was abandoned after 12 years by the father of her three children. He never told his family she existed and the couple lived apart. The same thing happened to Manju's mother before Manju was born. Now Manju's children face a life in poverty and without citizenship rights because their higher caste father will not admit they are his.

Nepalese Dalit filmmaker Anita Pariyar screened her documentary on the lives of Dalit women in Nepal. Nibha Singh, Nepali human rights activist, presented further evidence, on how Dalit women are forced into child marriage, are blamed for bad luck, have been forced to eat human faeces and that they suffer exploitation and violence from 'higher caste' men outside their communities as well as domestic violence in their own homes. Dalit children are consistently excluded from school and the community has little or no recourse to social justice. As Manju's experience shows, they are affected generation after generation.

Durga Sob, President of the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) of Nepal urged the British government and international community to support the full participation of Dalit women in the political change sweeping Nepal at this time and to ensure their representation and strong voice in the new Constituent Assembly and political structures. She stressed the need to ensure that Dalits without citizenship are able to freely register as Nepali citizens in order to fully participate in the upcoming election and cast their vote. Independent monitoring by the EU or International community of the participation of Dalits in the election is essential.

Most importantly the Dalit Women highlighted the action that all Nepalese Dalit women are taking daily to change their own and the lives of their communities, to secure a life free of discrimination in Nepal. They call upon the Nepalese government to end caste and gender discrimination in all spheres of public and private life and to ensure that comprehensive laws to protect their rights are fully implemented and impunity against violence and discrimination is stopped – now.

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