

## **DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK (UK)**

### **Press release**

#### **UK Government to raise Caste Discrimination Internationally**

The UK Government is committed to raising all forms of discrimination at an international level, including that of caste or untouchability. This was affirmed by Douglas Alexander, Foreign Office Minister of State, in the first formal debate on caste discrimination in the British Parliament held today. He outlined a number of ways in which the Government will take this forward, including more detailed monitoring of UK aid programmes, further discussions with EU colleagues about the human rights agenda to be raised with India before the end of the UK Presidency and more encouragement to the UN to forge ahead with its three-year study of caste discrimination.

Mr Alexander warmly welcomed the work of the Dalit Solidarity Network, and noted the commencement of the UN Human Rights Commission study. He said a questionnaire is to be circulated to all UN members by the end of this month. He also promised to raise with Ministerial colleagues the role of the Ambedkar Employment Principles in challenging UK investors in South Asia, the inclusion of caste discrimination in the UK within the current Equalities Bill, reports of discrimination against 'lower-caste' Gurkhas in the British Army and caste issues in relation to African countries such as Senegal.

The adjournment debate was introduced by DSN Trustee Jeremy Corbyn MP. Mr Corbyn outlined the nature of caste discrimination, or as the UN calls it 'discrimination by work and descent'. He pointed out that it affects some 300 million people world-wide, particularly in South Asia, Japan, and several African countries. He described some of the atrocities experienced by those suffering such discrimination, especially in India and Nepal, including the Gohana incident in August in the Indian state of Haryana when 60 Dalit houses were burned with police looking on. He reminded Parliament that such discrimination in India is referred to as the country's 'Hidden Apartheid', because of its parallels with South Africa's apartheid system.

Mr Corbyn also referred to the Hearing which took place in the US Congress last month, demonstrating the way caste discrimination is rising rapidly up the world human rights agenda. He pointed out that caste

discrimination also exists in the UK, and welcomed Mr Alexander's suggestion that such activity should come under UK race equality law. He also welcomed the Department of International Development's commitment seeking to ensure that all its programmes (direct or indirect through the World Bank and others) specifically benefit Dalit communities.

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Other MPs who contributed to the debate included Rob Marris from Wolverhampton, Nick Clegg from Sheffield and Andrew Selous from Bedfordshire. All raised specific and appropriate issues. The public seating for the debate was full, largely with representatives of the Dalit communities in the UK. The International Dalit Solidarity Network, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, the Dalit NGO Federation of Nepal and other Dalit communities are reported to be keenly watching the outcome. Revd David Haslam, Chair of the DSN, said, 'Many of the Dalit representatives here today have been enormously encouraged by this debate. They feel that at last the world is beginning to take notice of a massive, enduring and peculiarly vicious form of human rights violation. All those in the UK who are involved in any way in South Asia, politicians, UK companies, churches, aid agencies, need to be ensuring they address caste discrimination in every way possible in their contacts with these countries. The caste struggle is the apartheid struggle of the 21st century'.

Further information Revd David Haslam Chair, Dalit Solidarity Network

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22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2005