

2023 annual report



IDSN

International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

2023 annual report

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2023 Highlights

- IDSN celebrated its 20th Anniversary gathering together members, associates and friends
- IDSN General Assembly adopted new 2024-2030 strategy, elected a new board and charted the way forward
- Renu Sijapati was elected Chair of the IDSN board as the first Dalit woman from Nepal
- IDSN held its first UN side event titled 'Addressing the intersection of caste and gender-based violence in South Asia'
- Co-organised Kathmandu events to boost advocacy to end caste discrimination and bring Dalit youths to the fore
- IDSN delegation raised caste discrimination at UN Forum on Business and Human Rights & UN Forum on Minority Issues
- IDSN engaged with the UPR of Bangladesh and the outcomes of the UPR of India and Pakistan
- Dalit human rights defenders engage and speak out at the EU NGO Forum and key EU meetings with officials
- Key EU human rights reports highlight addressing caste discrimination
- Buraku discrimination was mentioned for the first time in an EU-Japan resolution



Foreword

Dear friends and supporters of the International Dalit Solidarity Network,

A warm welcome to our Annual Report 2023. It has been a remarkable year, and I am happy to report some real highs for 2023. We started the year having been informed that we had finally been granted ECOSOC Consultative Status. A 15-year wait had finally come to an end. Now IDSN members really do have a place at the table.

In turn this allowed us to formally sponsor our first side event which took place at the UN Human Rights Council in July in Geneva with three amazing Dalit women speakers and a special address from the Chief of the Women's Rights and Gender Section at the UN OHCHR. We are so grateful to many of our International Associates who have long helped open the doors at the UN for IDSN members and who co-sponsored our event. (See page 5 for the highlights)

At the same Human Rights Council, we ensured that three of our member organisations made video statements on the key issues affecting them in response to the Special Rapporteurs' reports on trafficking, poverty and climate change.

We have continued to work with the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies at the UN in Geneva and have made several submissions to inform Special Rapporteurs during their country visits – these have been highlighted in the report.

At the European Union, IDSN was able to facilitate the participation of two IDSN members from India and Nepal who made strong interventions at the EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights. The inroads that we have made at the EU have helped embed the issue of caste discrimination within the heart of the EU delegations in-country, most recently for the first time in Japan, as well as in Brussels.

We also applaud the European Parliament calls for stepping up consultations with Dalit communities and adopting a policy addressing intersectional discrimination in its Annual Report on Human Rights.

IDSN is committed to the skills development and capacity sharing of the next generation leadership – facilitating opportunities to learn about the systems and know how to advocate for their communities at the highest international levels. We were able to bring three young delegates from Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh to the UN Business and Human Rights and Minority Forums once again this year and you can see on page 8 how effectively they participated. In addition, Laxme Das was chosen as a panellist at one of main sessions of the Minority Forum, focussing on "Challenges to inclusion and equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups" in Bangladesh.

Our three main thematic objectives remained - Dalit Women and Gender Justice; Business and Human Rights; and Equality and Participation. However, it is important to note that there are multiple and intersectional issues that lie at the heart of all our work.

We also ended the year on another high. IDSN held its first General Assembly in five years, as representatives from IDSN's member organisations and international associates from across the globe gathered for a two-day general assembly meeting in Geneva on 24-25 November. IDSN would not be the force it is today without the passion and commitment of everyone in the network.

As always, particular thanks to the IDSN Board and the small but mightily powerful Secretariat who have worked tirelessly to ensure ending caste discrimination remains high on the human rights agenda, and that #DalitLivesMatter.

So, once again, thank you to all who contribute to our work in whatever way they can. Our work together has not ended, but we remain in hope for a world free from caste.

Meena Varma

Executive Director - IDSN

Dalit Women and Gender Justice

The highlight of IDSN's work on caste and gender justice in 2023, was the first ever IDSN organised UN side-event, 'Addressing the intersection of caste and gender-based violence in South Asia'. It was also a year with active participation of Dalit women of varying ages and nationalities in IDSN's delegations at the UN and EU. The voices of Dalit women were heard loud and clear throughout the year on international platforms. In addition to this, IDSN also provided ample input and documentation on the situation of Dalit women to UN and EU mechanisms and to initiatives and platforms working on business and human rights.

On internal lines, 2023 was the year where an IDSN board was elected comprised of 8 women out of 10 board members and five of them Dalit women, including the Chair – Renu Sijapati – the first Dalit woman from Nepal to be Chair of the IDSN Board.

Caste and Gender justice is reflected in all of IDSN's activities in 2023 but in this chapter we explore some of the caste and gender justice highlights.

Caste and gender-based violence addressed at UN side event

Following IDSN's ECOSOC accreditation IDSN officially hosted its first side event at the UN 53rd Human Rights Council on 5 July. The event focused on caste and gender-based violence and approximately 30 NGOs and 10 member states attended and the event was also livestreamed to X (Twitter).

Speakers at the event included Dalit women leaders, Sarita Barmashakha from the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) in Nepal, Priyadharsini Palaniswamy from The Blue Club and Manjula Pradeep from Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet), from India. Hannah Wu, Chief of Women's Rights and Gender Section, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, opened the event.

The event brought the issue of caste-based sexual violence in South Asia into the international spotlight; and highlighted the challenges and barriers to accessing justice faced by Dalit survivors in the region.

The need for international attention and action to address human rights violations, stemming from caste and gender discrimination and violence, was highlighted by the speakers, as was the need to hold authorities accountable to human rights obligations and implementation of protections, remedies and legislation.

The side event was co-sponsored by International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), FORUM-ASIA, Minority Rights Group and Human Rights Watch (HRW) and supported by Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet), The Blue Club, Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) and the National Council of Women Leaders (NCWL).

Caste and gender justice raised at the UN Human Rights Council

Throughout the year IDSN continuously interacted with the UN Human Rights Council and raised caste and gender justice at every opportunity. Interactions included submissions, informational meetings, participation in key events and advocacy meetings with states and UN officials.

IDSN also issued recommendations for the [52nd](#), [53rd](#) and [54th](#) session of the UN Human Rights Council, where addressing caste and gender justice was a central theme. The recommendations were widely circulated.

Recommendations included concern over Dalit women and caste-hate speech, water and sanitation, access to education, manual scavenging, forced and bonded labour, and caste- and gender-based violence and sexual abuse.

Dalit women speak out on caste and gender-based violence at IDSN's first UN side event



Panel at the UN event. Photos by IDSN

Sarita Barmashakha highlighted the plight of Dalit women in Nepal, stressing the urgency for systemic change to address the high incidence of violence, recommending effective implementation of anti-discrimination laws, universal access to quality education and government action for Dalit inclusion and empowerment.

“Rape and sexual assault are major violations experienced by Dalit women and girls in Nepal due to their lower social status and vulnerability. Sexual violence is sometimes used as a weapon to assert caste-based dominance and control over Dalit women and girls.”

Sarita Barmashakha, FEDO, Nepal

Priyadharsini Palaniswamy addressed the “caste-based digital divide” in India and South Asia, advocating for initiatives like the National Digital Literacy Mission to bridge the gap, speedy access to information and communication technology (ICT) for Dalits, making online caste-hate speech punishable and holding social media platforms accountable for harmful content related to caste.

“I am going to talk about the famous “caste-based digital divide” in India – the inequality in access to ICTs based on the location of one's caste. Why? Because just like how all the important components of a digital device are embedded in their motherboard, caste system has been embedded in every Indian's mindset.”

“The same anonymity with which the internet offers a safe space for Dalits to express themselves gives [dominant] caste Hindus the power to attack with impunity. The digital space has not only left a divide amongst castes in India it has also become an unregulated and unsafe space for Dalits in India especially the most vulnerable amongst the Dalits – women and LGBTQIA persons.”

Priyadharsini Palaniswamy, The Blue Club, India

Manjula Pradeep emphasised the intersectionality of caste and gender-based violence in India, advocating for recognition of caste-based sexual violence as a systemic crime, regular reviews of legislation, disaggregated data collection and a law to protect Human Rights Defenders.

“Dalit women human rights defenders face several challenges while working with survivors and victim's families. Some face opposition within their families, control over their mobility, lack of control and ownership of economic resources, like land and property, threats and intimidation by dominant-caste people, including threats of sexual violence and murder, and lack of support from other collectives and organisations working in the same sphere.”

Manjula Pradeep, DHRDNet, India

The recommendations were followed up by advocacy meetings and further interactions throughout the year.

IDSN was especially active at the 53rd Human Rights Council Session where, in addition to the side-event and recommendations, IDSN had speakers participating in key UN dialogues.

Jarna Das working for Parittran in Bangladesh, read a [statement](#) at the Interactive Dialogue on the Special Rapporteur on trafficking's report. The Special Rapporteur visited Bangladesh in 2022 and presented her report at the HRC53. IDSN and Parittran welcomed this report, which specifically highlighted the vulnerabilities of Dalits to child trafficking. The organisations recommended that Bangladesh develop and implement a National Action Plan to eliminate caste-based discrimination, with an emphasis on Dalit women and girls.

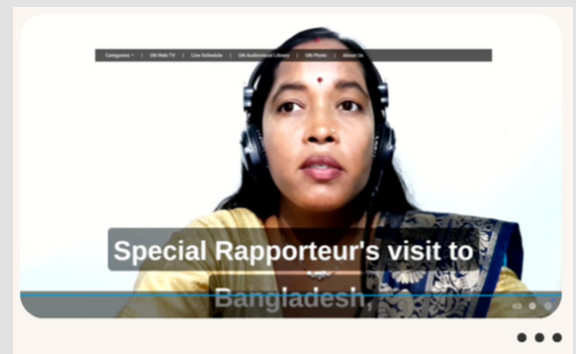
Kalpna Biswakarma, part of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in India, prepared a [statement](#) to be read at the Interactive Dialogue on the Special Rapporteur on poverty's report, highlighting the need to address caste and gender discrimination in employment schemes. Unfortunately, due to time pressures it was not able to be broadcast but was subsequently posted online.

Swapon Kumar Das, the Executive Director of DALIT in Bangladesh, made a [statement](#) at the Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Special Rapporteur (SR) on climate change. The statement raised that IDSN and DALIT were disappointed to find that the SR did not meet with Dalits, around 10 million people in Bangladesh and highlighted the many issues faced by Dalits in Bangladesh in relation to climate change.

Universal Periodic Reviews

In March, IDSN, Parittran, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, DALIT and Nagorik Uddyog, submitted a joint [report](#) to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh. This report highlighted the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh with much emphasis on Dalit women and girls.

Attention to caste and gender justice was also evident in the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) - following IDSN's engagement with these mechanisms.



“Facing sexual and psychological harassment in educational institutions further discourages Dalit girls from attending schools or colleges. Studies have found only 6% of Dalit girls complete a secondary level education. ... We call on Bangladesh to develop and implement a National Action Plan to eliminate caste-based discrimination, with an emphasis on Dalit women and girls”

Jharna Das, Parittran, Bangladesh - speaking at the UN



“While employment schemes can provide short-term relief, they must be accompanied by efforts to address the underlying structural and the societal factors that perpetuate caste-based discrimination...”

Kalpna Biswakarma, NCDHR, India - speaking at the UN



“Most Dalit girls drop out of education and around 95% are victims of child marriage. Dalits also face discrimination when accessing relief ... when Dalits go to shelters, they can face discrimination, sexual harassment and rape. We urge Bangladesh to develop a SMART climate action plan with special policies focused on Dalit issues, in consultation with Dalits.”

Swapon Kumar Das, DALIT, Bangladesh - speaking at the UN



Prameela KP speaking at EU-NGO Forum. Photo by Daphne Matthys

Submission to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

In September, IDSN made a [submission](#) to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls - to contribute to the upcoming stocktaking of the Working Group and add to its reporting to the Human Rights Council in 2024.

The submission highlighted intersectional caste and gender discrimination and the resulting human rights violations including violence, rape, slavery, forced marriage and forced conversions, lack of access to justice and lack of access to education and services. The submission also gave a snapshot of the specific country situation of Dalit women in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka.

In the submission, IDSN recommended that the Working Group addresses the situation by issuing a thematic report dedicated to examining caste-based discrimination's impact on Dalit women and girls. Furthermore, IDSN suggested incorporating a dedicated section on the situation of women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination in all thematic reports and proposed that the Working Group plans a country visit to India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, to actively engage with and address caste discrimination against women and girls in these regions.

Caste and gender justice raised at the EU

Throughout the year, caste and gender justice was raised in EU submissions and in bilateral meetings with EU officials and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). In November, Prameela KP, who works with the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), part of NCDHR, spoke about the situation of Dalit women and girls at the 25th EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights under the theme "Youth as actors of change for human rights."

Ms. KP actively participated as a Rapporteur for a session on the Asia-Pacific region, proposing recommendations for action to the EU. As a Dalit woman human rights defender from India, the EU-NGO Forum provided her with a platform to voice the many violations faced by Dalits and initiate a dialogue on addressing caste and gender-based violence against Dalit women and girls in India and share her extensive insights with participants at the forum. You can find more information about the EU-NGO Forum in the Equality and Participation chapter of this report.

Ms. KP was subsequently invited to the EU-India MEP delegation meeting with civil society in December in New Delhi, where she spoke on caste discrimination and caste and gender justice, giving key recommendations for action.



IDSN Delegation at the UN Forums in 2023. Photo by IDSN

Advocating for equality: IDSN delegation addresses challenges faced by Dalits at key UN Forums

An IDSN delegation of Dalit human rights defenders participated in the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights held on 27-29 November as well as the UN Forum on Minority Issues from 30 November – 1 December 2023, held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The delegation made an important impact giving statements and participating in panels, sessions and events.

Delegation participants were Laxme Das from the Bangladesh Khulna-based organization DALIT, Bandana Bishwakarma of the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO) and Chander Kohli from Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN). The three delegates took part in key sessions on business and human rights that affect the rights of Dalits in global supply chains and met with important stakeholders on the sidelines of the sessions.

The Forum on Minority Issues was held under the theme “Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation.” Laxme Das, was invited as a key speaker on the panel for Item 1, which focused on “Challenges to inclusion and equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups.” Her [statement](#) shed light on the struggles of Dalit women and girls in Bangladesh, who face systemic and structural challenges, compounded by gender discrimination and gave key recommendations for action for the Government of Bangladesh to address the situation.

Chander Kohli, made a powerful [intervention](#) during Item 3, which focused on “Legal and Structural Approaches to More Inclusive Societies.” In his statement, Mr. Kohli highlighted

the plight of Dalits in Pakistan estimated to constitute 85% of the Hindu minority. He pointed out the severe human rights violations and the challenges faced by the Dalit community, including bonded labor, limited access to education, and political underrepresentation.

Bandana Bishwakarma also prepared a [statement](#) on the issues faced by Dalits in Nepal, but unfortunately did not get the chance to present this at the Forum - the statement has been shared on the IDSN website.

In addition to their participation in the Forum, the IDSN delegation held meetings with country delegations discussing the discrimination and human rights abuses faced by Dalits in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

The Forum also featured two side-events highly relevant to the issue of caste discrimination. One was organised by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on “Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation: A remedy to overcoming exclusion and giving a voice to minorities” and was chaired by IDSN’s Executive Director, Meena Varma. A second side-event “Building on regional recognition towards a resolution on the rights of communities discriminated on work and descent”, was organised by the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD).

IDSN delegation’s presence at the UN Forums brought Dalit voices to the fore in advocating for the rights and well-being of Dalits and other marginalised communities worldwide.

Business and Human Rights

IDSN's work on caste, business and human rights ranged from participating in key UN fora, consultations and dialogues on related topics including slavery, discrimination and trafficking to EU processes and consultations such as the EU-India free trade agreement and Sri Lanka GSP+ consultations.

IDSN also took part in influential networks such as the Ethical Trading Initiative in Denmark, UK and Norway. We furthermore engaged on many occasions with IDSN members and associates working on this topic including Advocating Rights in South Asia (ARISA), who published a study on caste discrimination in the leather industry.

Sri Lanka GSP+ consultations

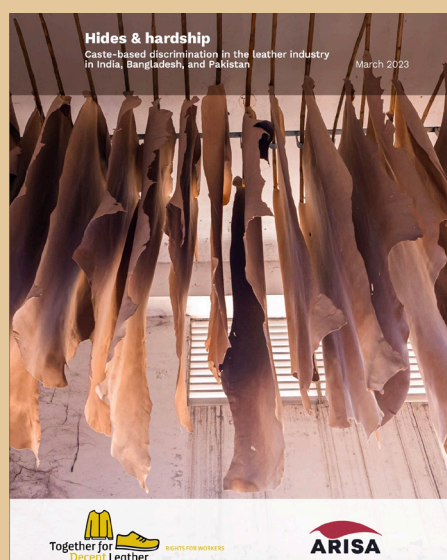
In April, IDSN took part in civil society consultations with the EU on Sri Lanka, ahead of GSP+ (Generalised System of Preferences + for countries committing to human rights). Dr. Siva from Human Development Organization (HDO) took part in the meeting and subsequently IDSN facilitated an in person local meeting with the EU Delegation to discuss the situation of Dalits working in tea plantations in Sri Lanka.

EU-India free trade agreement (FTA)

In July to August, IDSN input into the EU-India Free Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment commissioned by the EU to an external consortium. IDSN submitted information relative to the sectors that employ most Dalits, the conditions, migration movements and other information useful to conduct a baseline pre-trade agreement and the potential impact of a trade opening. This was done to highlight caste discrimination in India, how it could be affected by the EU-India FTA and what measures could be included by the EU to positively impact on caste discrimination reduction. Caste and Dalits were widely reflected in the [human rights chapter](#) of the report - including in multiple case studies and baselines.

Leather report

Caste discrimination in the leather industry in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan



A [report](#) released by IDSN associate ARISA (Advocating Rights in South Asia) in March 2023 examined the interlinkages between labour exploitation in the leather industry in South Asia and caste.

The report shows that caste and related discriminatory practices, at times specifically interwoven with religion, are high risk factors for businesses that source leather or leather products from India, Bangladesh or Pakistan. It explains how caste-based and religious-based discrimination presents itself in these countries and how this connects to the leather industry.



Photo by: AIDMAM

Caste and labour raised at UN HRC

Throughout the year caste and business was raised in submissions and dialogues with the UN Human Rights Council mechanisms where topics like slavery, child labour, trafficking and abuse in work settings were raised. These concerns were also included in IDSN's recommendations for the [52nd](#), [53rd](#) and [54th](#) session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Working with the Ethical Trading Initiative

On a regular basis in 2023, IDSN held meetings and participated in events with the Ethical Trading Initiatives in Denmark, Norway and the UK. This included participation in the seminar "Hidden Homeworkers: from theory to practice" organised jointly by the ETIs, where IDSN raised the issue of caste, gender and human rights violations in relation to homeworkers in supply chains.

Training session on caste-based discrimination in UK businesses and global supply chains

In July, the Dalit Solidarity Network UK held two events shedding light on caste-based discrimination in UK businesses and global supply chains. The events were organised in collaboration with the Ethical Trading Initiative, School of Advanced Study at the University of London, IDSN and the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights.

The event brought together representatives from nine UK-based companies with supply chain links in regions affected by caste, aiming to equip them with tools to detect and address caste discrimination in their operations. Presentations by DSN UK Director Gazala Shaikh, Chair Corinne Lennox alongside ETI's Hannah Bruce and Beena Pallical of the Asia Dalit Rights Forum, facilitated discussions on strategies to combat caste-based discrimination.

Subsequently, a meeting featured Dalit rights activist Manjula Pradeep from DHRDNet in India and Peter McAllister, Director of the Ethical Trading Initiative, UK, sharing insights. Attendees were inspired by Ms. Pradeep's account of her work, complemented by a screening of the documentary "Dalit Defenders: United in the Struggle for Dignity and Justice". Peter McAllister provided expertise on recognising and addressing discriminatory practices within business supply chains, rounding off a comprehensive exploration of tackling caste-based discrimination in corporate settings.

UN Forum on Business and Human Rights

As highlighted on page 8, an IDSN delegation of Dalit human rights defenders actively participated at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights from 27-29 November. They took part in sessions and dialogues and spoke about issues faced by Dalits including forced and bonded labour, child labour, violence and sexual abuse in the workplace and discrimination in access to work.

Equality and Participation

Equality and participation is cross-cutting in all of IDSN's work and therefore also reflected in the previous chapters. In this chapter we look at some of the additional work IDSN has done, with the EU and UN especially, to address caste discrimination, equality and participation.

Meeting with EU Special Representative for Human Rights

In July, IDSN organised a meeting between IDSN Bangladesh members Parittran and DALIT and EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, during his visit to Dhaka. In addition to this, later in the year, IDSN participated in EU civil society consultations ahead of the UN UPR Bangladesh including dialogue with EU Delegations and EU Member State representations in Geneva to brief them on IDSN's recommendations.

Dalit voices resonate in Brussels at the EU NGO Forum

In December, Dalit activists forming part of the IDSN delegation made their presence felt at the 25th EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights in Brussels, Belgium. The Forum was organised by the European Commission and the European External Action Service in partnership with the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), under the theme "Youth as actors of change for human rights." It provided a platform to discuss the work of young human rights defenders worldwide, the challenges they face, and opportunities to shape the future of human rights.

Sunil Kumar Pariyar, from Nepal and Prameela KP, from India, joined the forum to highlight the challenges faced by Dalit communities in their respective countries and beyond. Prameela's presentation is reflected earlier in this report.

Mr. Pariyar, founder of Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources (DANAR), [presented](#) a compelling case at the forum, shedding light on the Dalit community's struggles in Nepal.



Sunil, Prameela and the IDSN EU Adviser in Brussels. Photo: IDSN

He emphasized that Dalits, who are primarily farmers, face discrimination in accessing agricultural land, water for irrigation and even clean drinking water. Additionally, they bear the brunt of climate change impacts, making them one of the most vulnerable and impoverished groups in Nepal. His aim was to raise awareness about these issues and draw attention to the urgent need for change.

In addition to their contributions during the forum, the activists held several advocacy meetings with EU officials, facilitated by IDSN's EU adviser.

Buraku mention in EU-Japan resolution

Together with the International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), IDSN briefed EU officials in relation to caste discrimination faced by the Buraku, to be raised in the EU-Japan human rights consultations. The European Parliament's [EU-Japan resolution](#) now contains the first ever mention of Buraku discrimination, on which IDSN and IMADR will follow up.

Human Rights Report

European Parliament calls for stepping up consultations with Dalit communities and adopting a policy addressing intersectional discrimination

IDSN welcomed the European Parliament's annual [report](#) on global human rights and democracy published in 2023. In addition to previous calls for a "policy on caste discrimination" and the adoption of measures to combat it, the report urges the EU to implement specific local strategies to tackle caste-based discrimination. These strategies should be developed through dialogue with local Dalit representatives and civil society and should encompass implementation and monitoring of EU agreements and instruments. MEPs also advocate for addressing intersectionality to combat various forms of discrimination faced by women and girls affected by caste-based violations, spanning political, economic and social spheres. The call to action extends across all areas of EU engagement with affected countries, emphasising the urgent need for the European Commission, External Action Service and Council to respond.

EU annual reports highlight caste

Two annual human rights reports coming out of the European Union in 2023 highlight the need for action to combat caste-based discrimination.

In the box above you can read about the European Parliament's (EP) report released in January, and in August the EU published its Annual Report on human rights with mentions of caste and Dalits in the chapters of the report on India, Nepal and Bangladesh. IDSN welcomed the reports and published summaries of the mentions online.

Caste, climate change and natural disasters raised at the EU and UN

IDSN also facilitated that the nexus of caste, climate change and natural disasters was raised at the EU and the UN. In July, Pirbhu Satyani, from the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), had an online meeting with the EU Humanitarian aid department and later the same month had a conversation with EU Directorate General for Humanitarian Affairs (ECHO), to explore what progress had been made following up on the EU funded report 'Equality in Aid' and the EP Annual Report on human rights in the world.

At the UN, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change held virtual consultations with civil society where Sunil Pariyar from DANAR, attended and spoke about climate issues for Dalits in Nepal. Furthermore Swapon Kumar Das, of DALIT in Bangladesh read out a statement at the Interactive Dialogue on the Special Rapporteur (SR) on climate change, referenced earlier in this report.

Engagement on human rights and caste hate speech with the OHCHR and Special Rapporteurs

IDSN continuously engaged with officials at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and briefed Special Rapporteurs on caste discrimination throughout the year. The need to act on implementation on the UN OHCHR Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination, was raised with the OHCHR in Geneva and in Bangkok.

In June, IDSN made a [submission](#) to the Special Rapporteur on Racism's report on online hate speech for the 78th session of the General Assembly detailing the serious problems with caste-hate speech in online settings and the caste-gender nexus that needs specific attention.

IDSN also offered extensive input to the Special Rapporteur on Poverty ahead of his visit to Bangladesh.

Engagement with UN UPRs of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan

Probir Sircar, from Parittran in Bangladesh, made a statement on caste discrimination at the UPR pre-session for Bangladesh. The statement echoed the concerns raised in the [joint submission](#) on the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh, made by IDSN and members, and added his observations from his daily work with Dalit rights in Bangladesh. He was the first Dalit from the community to be selected to be on the UPR panel for Bangladesh.

The UPR of Bangladesh took place in November, where several states raised the issue of caste-based discrimination and the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh.

The outcome report of the UPR of India, that IDSN engaged with the previous year, was adopted in March at the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council. During this 4th cycle of the UN Universal Periodic Review of India, the country received eight direct [recommendations](#) on caste, including topics such as racism, water, forced marriage and child labour.

Dalit human rights defender, Manjula Pradeep, from DHRDNet, was able to give a statement during the adoption. She welcomed India's engagement with the UPR and commended the work done on ending violence against Adivasi and Dalit women and girls. However, she highlighted that there had been an increase of rape cases between 2015 and 2020 and noted that many victims and survivors of caste-based discrimination are not able to file their cases with the police. She called upon the Indian government to support recommendations on caste discrimination and violence against Dalit women and girls and implement a comprehensive strategy to identify barriers to access to justice.

The outcome report on the UN UPR of Pakistan was also published during the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council in June-July. IDSN had engaged with input and



“The UPR pre-session event has allowed us to garner support from sympathetic governments, international bodies and other stakeholders. At the same time this event has represented a pivotal step in our journey toward fostering a more just and equitable society in Bangladesh”

Probir Sircar, Parittran, Bangladesh - speaking on the UPR

dialogues leading up to the review. The outcomes of the review have implications for all marginalised communities in Pakistan, including Dalits, who form a significant portion of the religious and ethnic minority groups in the country. IDSN was disappointed to note that there were no direct mentions of caste or Dalits in the outcome report, despite comprehensive input. However the challenges faced by Dalits were highlighted under other terms such as minorities.

The recommendations provide a roadmap for the Pakistani government to address these challenges and ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of all its citizens, irrespective of their religious or caste affiliations. IDSN made a [summary](#) of caste relevant recommendations from the outcome report.



Youth at the forefront: Kathmandu events boost advocacy to end caste discrimination

Marking the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a series of events focusing on combatting descent-based discrimination, through the prism of access to justice and the role of youth in South Asia, were held in Kathmandu, Nepal. Spanning four days, from September 4th to 7th, the events were organised jointly by Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section (IPMS) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD).

The first day saw a vibrant workshop gathering 60 individuals, including 50 young participants from diverse backgrounds such as the LGBTQI+ community, persons with disabilities and Dalit and non-Dalits.

Representing nations like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the discourse centered on how to amplify the rights of those hailing from descent-based communities.

The essential idea was to position young people at the forefront of this movement, molding the future trajectory of human rights in consonance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights commitments.

The subsequent day focused on engaging youth even further. A comprehensive training on anti-discrimination, grounded in international human rights law, opened new avenues for advocacy, providing participants with tools to challenge and rectify systemic issues.

On September 6th, a crucial dialogue was initiated with bodies like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nepal and the National Dalit Commission (NDC). Alongside several NGOs, the conversation delved into evaluating the contributions of National Human Rights Institutions in mitigating descent-based discrimination and suggesting avenues for improvement. During all three events collecting good practices was at the forefront.

The final day involved a visit to a Dalit community in Suthan. Engaging with community leaders, the IPMS team deepened its understanding of ground realities. This was followed by constructive consultations with the Dalit NGO Federation, an umbrella organization representing over 500 NGOs. The day culminated in a significant dialogue with 12 Nepalese parliamentarians, shedding light on the progression and application of anti-discrimination legislations.

The four-day gathering successfully achieved its aims of energizing the youth, directly addressing issues of descent-based discrimination and providing them with advocacy tools.

Moreover, the events provided a platform for participants to present proposals to IPMS, ensuring that the momentum built during these Kathmandu sessions is carried forward into future endeavors.

IDSN furthermore engaged with providing input to the OHCHR's marking of the 75th anniversary of the UDHR, throughout 2023.

Organisation and Networking

Much effort in 2023 was channeled into the IDSN General Assembly and shaping the new IDSN strategy 2024-2030. It was also a year for celebrating the 20th Anniversary of IDSN and reflecting on the many achievements but also all the work that remains to be done.

General Assembly

In November, IDSN held its General Assembly gathering IDSN members and associates for two full days of meetings in Geneva. The General Assembly feature on the following page gives insight into all the great exchanges and topics raised.

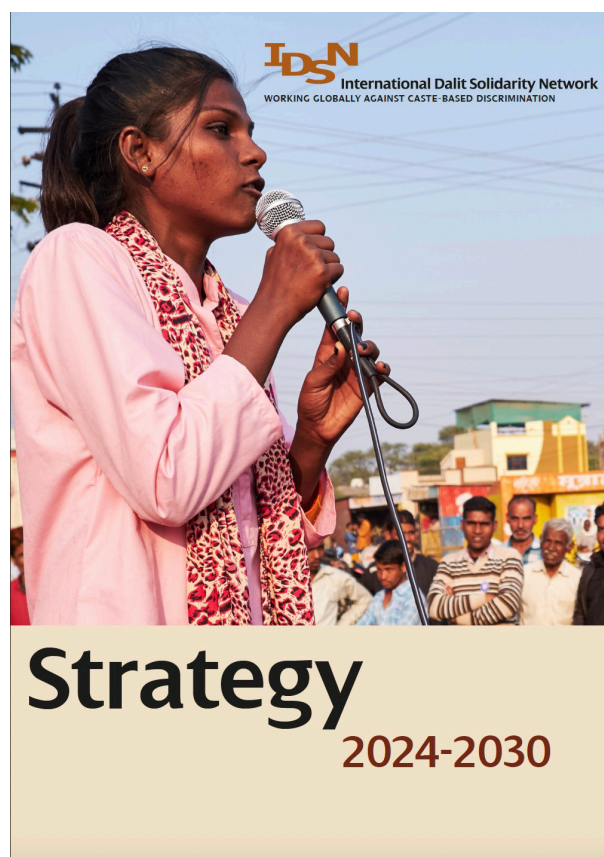
The General Assembly also marked the 20th anniversary of IDSN as an officially registered organisation and this was celebrated at a reception in connection with the meetings.

The General Assembly had several important points to address including the election of new board members and the adoption of the new IDSN strategy.

New strategy 2024-2030 adopted

Following more than a year of consultations, dialogue and numerous Board meetings dedicated to strategy, a draft strategy was presented and discussed at the IDSN General Assembly and subsequently adopted unanimously.

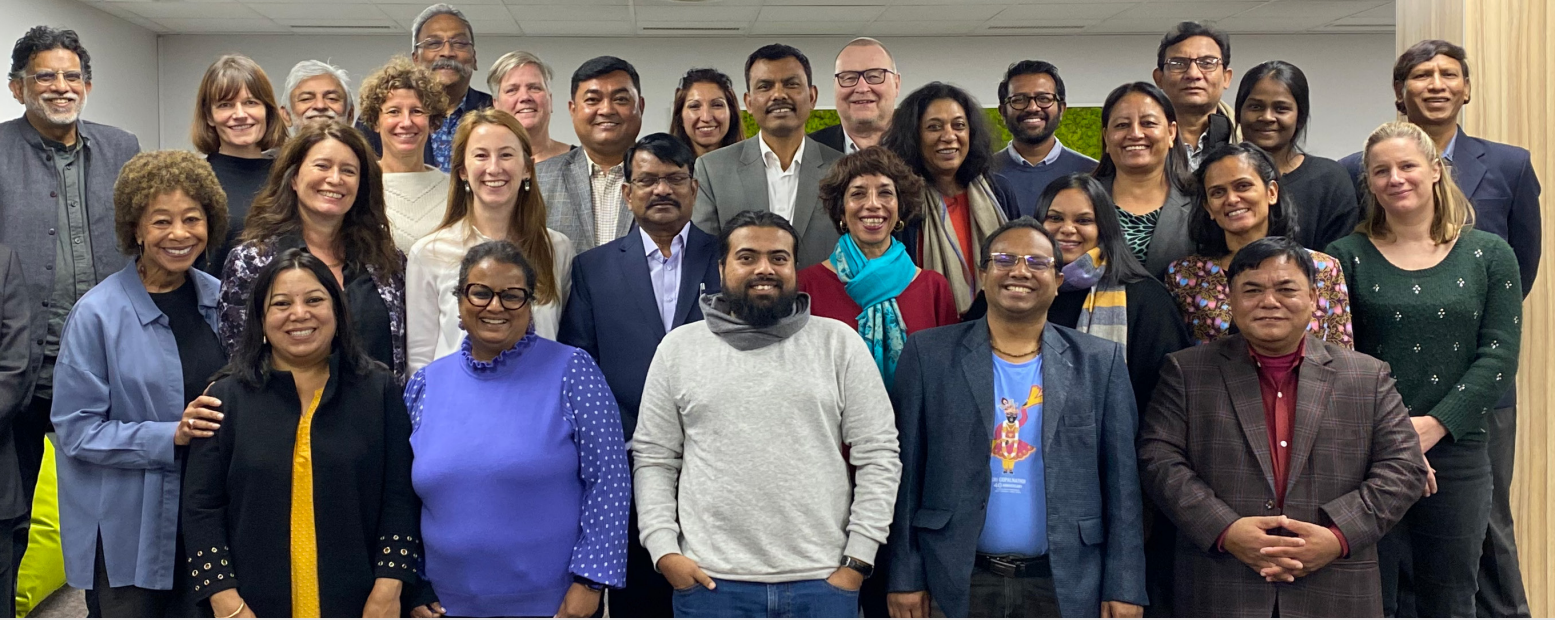
The new strategy builds on IDSN's previous strategy, but focuses IDSN's work from 2024-2030 in on the two thematic areas; caste and gender justice and caste, business and human rights. These thematic areas incorporate the cross-cutting themes; access to justice, equity and participation, and intersectional discrimination. The long term objectives within these priorities is to achieve caste and gender justice with a particular focus on Dalit women and youth and to eliminate caste-related labour exploitation and abuse in global supply chains. To make a contribution in the work towards these objectives the strategy has defined key targets to be achieved by 2030 which can be found in the [strategy document](#).



Governance

IDSN's work in 2023 was carried out in adherence with IDSN statutes, bylaws and policies and continued to be centred around the IDSN 2018-2023 [strategy](#), while the Secretariat also began planning actions for 2024 under the new strategy. IDSN undertook a review of IDSN's activities and efficiency, carried out by Gender at Work - India, as part of IDSN's grant from the Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF) - the review is to be completed in 2024.

Reporting on activities and finances was carried out throughout the year and the IDSN Board held five meetings where two affiliates were promoted to members, the IDSN strategy discussed and the IDSN General Assembly and other events were planned.



Participants at the General Assembly. Photo by IDSN

IDSN members and associates gather to review, strategize and chart the way forward

Perspectives, ideas, insights and engagement filled the room as representatives from IDSN's member organisations and international associates from across the globe gathered for a two-day general assembly meeting in Geneva on 24-25 November.

The General Assembly members reviewed and approved IDSN's upcoming [strategy](#) from 2024-2030 and in workshops discussed and charted out ways to make effective progress under the strategic themes – caste and gender justice and caste, business and human rights.

One group also looked at how to catalyse international solidarity to increase support to Dalit human rights defenders. The workshops yielded new ideas, including on how to better engage youth in the work and paved the way for designing a solid implementation plan for the new IDSN strategy.

IDSN's EU and UN advisers presented on IDSN's advocacy work and had interactive Q&As with the members to gather feedback and perspectives on how to best take this work forward in the coming strategy period.

A session on the Asia Dalit Rights Forum looked into synergies in future ways of working together with IDSN while a session on international solidarity looked at how IDSN's international associates such as Human Rights Watch, Forum Asia, IMADR and many others could be drawn upon to support the work of IDSN.

The network was also joined by special guests including IDSN Ambassador Gay McDougall, Member of the UN CERD Committee and the first ever Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; Miloon Kothari, previously UN Special Rapporteur on Housing and founding member of the Working Group on Human Rights in India; as well as Michele Buteau, of the UN OHCHR Minority Section, who has worked with IDSN for many years. They offered great advice and support to IDSN in taking the work forward over the coming years.

Board elections were held, as a great deal of IDSN's Board members had come to the end of their terms, and many fresh faces were elected to the IDSN Board while thanks was given to the outgoing board members for their extensive contributions to IDSN over the course of their terms on the Board.

The new Board is made up of 60 percent Dalit leaders from the South Asia and out of ten Board members, eight Board members are women and seven Board members are from the Global South.

The 20th anniversary of IDSN was also celebrated by all at a reception and marked with illustrations of IDSN's many achievements over the years.

Participants left Geneva with renewed inspiration and a common framework from which to continue the work for a world free of caste discrimination.

New IDSN Board

As six board members ended their term in 2023, there were only three continuing Board members following Board elections at the IDSN General Assembly and seven new board members were elected.

The Board members all bring unique insights and expertise to the work and leadership of IDSN. The board is now comprised of five Dalit women from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India and one Dalit man from India, representing IDSN's members in South Asia. They are joined by two representatives from IDSN's international associates and two representatives from Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe. Board as of 31 December is 8 women and 2 men.

Finances and funding

We would like to thank the following for their generous contribution to IDSN in 2023: the Norwegian Human Rights Foundation, Bread for the World (Germany), Laudes Foundation and those who made individual private donations through PayPal and Candid. IDSN continued fundraising efforts in 2023 in order to ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of the organisation. See the financial statements on page 18.

Secretariat

The IDSN Secretariat team is based across Europe and work together remotely as well as at the headquarters in Copenhagen.

IDSN Secretariat as of 31 December 2023:

- Executive Director
Meena Varma
- Head of Communications
Maria Brink Schleimann
- Programme and Finance Officer
Madeleine Cowper
- UN Advocacy Adviser
Mercè Monje Cano
- EU Advocacy Adviser
Emma Achilli
- Bookkeeper
Peter Soby Petersen

Board

IDSN welcomes Renu Sijapati as chair of the IDSN Board



IDSN was delighted with the appointment of Ms Renu Sijapati as the first Dalit woman from Nepal to be elected chair of the IDSN board, following approval of the board at IDSN's General Assembly. Ms. Sijapati is the General Secretary of the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) and will be continuing her tenure on the IDSN board. Ms. Sijapati will lead the newly constituted Board, bringing her invaluable experience and expertise to the forefront and further supporting IDSN's strategic aims on caste and gender justice.

Website, newsletter and social media

Engaging with members, associates and affiliates, as well as with the wider public, policy makers, academics and activists was key to IDSN's communication activities in 2023. IDSN maintained its outreach through various communication channels including the IDSN website, newsletters and social media.

IDSN's social media platforms remained integral to our communications, facilitating interaction among members and associates and enabling the cross-promotion of news and documentation. Followers on IDSN's X (formerly Twitter) channel rose by 5% to 5782. Due to the changes from Twitter to X, IDSN is no longer able to access data on impressions, tweets and retweets, but our X activities continued in 2023 as in former years. Additionally, news

was shared on IDSN's LinkedIn and Facebook pages.

On YouTube, views of IDSN's online video on Dalit women surpassed 232,520, while views of the IDSN intro video on caste discrimination exceeded 108,500, across various translations. The original "I'm Dalit, How Are You?" video garnered 234,000 views.

The IDSN website continued to serve as a pivotal resource for activists, academics, policymakers, and decision-makers globally, attracting over 60,000 users and accumulating more than 110,000 pageviews from visitors spanning over 160 different countries in 2023.

IDSN added over 50 new entries focusing on caste discrimination to the online IDSN database. These entries are meticulously cross-referenced and searchable by theme, institution, country, year and other relevant parameters.

Seventeen news articles, encompassing developments across all of IDSN's thematic priorities at the UN and EU levels, as well as within countries affected by caste discrimination, were published on the IDSN website. These articles, informed by IDSN's efforts and input from network members and associates, were also disseminated through IDSN's regular newsletters, which saw a rise in subscribers to 742 in 2023.

IDSN Publications

In March, IDSN published the Annual Report 2022-23 and distributed it widely in the network and beyond.

In December, the IDSN Strategy 2024-2030 was produced and published.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023

Profit and loss

	2023 DKK	2023 EURO	2022 DKK
Opening balance^a	431,446.53	57,834.04	463,810.46
Income			
Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF)	681,364.64	91,334.76	836,234.44
Brot für die Welt	1,724,012.57	232,000.00	1,156,840.02
Other income	596.32	79.93	21,803.56
Brot für die Welt paid 2021			96,501.60
NHRF paid 2021			418,104.69
Laudes Foundation	38,655.00	5,181.58	
Total	2,444,628.53	327,694.68	2,529,484.31
Expenditure	2,582,909.82	346,230.85	2,561,848.24
Result	-138,281.29	-18,536.17	-32,363.93
Balance	293,165.24	39,297.87	431,446.53

Balance statement

	2023 DKK	2023 EURO	2022 DKK
Assets			
Cash at bank at 31.12.	786,412.45	105,416.09	542,631.68
Other assets			
Rent deposit	13,326.00	1,786.31	13,326.00
Petty cash	10,548.16	1,413.95	5,004.73
Outstanding accounts	22,392.56	3,001.65	4,775.74
Total other assets	46,266.72	6,201.91	23,106.47
Liabilities			
Balance Master Card account	0.00	0.00	-1,134.10
Compulsory holiday payment fund	-549.01	-73.59	-5,920.31
2) Outstanding Accounts	-131,928.65	-17,684.62	-128,371.31
3) Laudes Foundation for 2024	-333,117.27	-44,653.31	
4) NHRF-evaluation for 2024	-73,919.00		
Total Liabilities	-539,513.93	-62,411.52	-134,291.62
Balance carried forward	293,165.24	39,297.87	431,446.53

The financial statements are presented in Danish kroner.

For reasons of comparison, amounts in Euro are presented, using a fixed exchange rate based on a monthly average from Inforeuro: 7.4601

Hence, some discrepancies may appear compared to actual amounts received in Euro.

Notes:

1) Opening balance is in accordance with accounts for 2022

2) Consist of audit, annual report, insurance and tax for 2023 to be paid in 2024

3) Support paid in 2023 for use in 2024

4) Grant for evaluation in 2023 to be paid in 2024

**International Dalit Solidarity Network**

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info@idsn.org
www.idsn.org
www.idsn.org/newsletter

Connect with IDSN on social

-  twitter.com/idsnupdates
-  linkedin.com/company/idsn
-  facebook.com/dalitnetwork
-  youtube.com/idsnvideo

Members as of 1 April 2024**Nepal**

- Dalit NGO Federation
- Feminist Dalit Organization
- Jagaran Media Center
- Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation
- Dalit Welfare Organisation
- Dignity Initiatives
- Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources

Pakistan

- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network
- Center for Law & Justice

Sri Lanka

- Human Development Organization

India

- National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
- National Federation of Dalit Women
- People's Watch
- The Blue Club
- READ – the Rights Education & Development Centre
- National Confederation of Dalit & Adivasi Organisations
- Social Awareness Society for Youths

Bangladesh

- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement
- DALIT (Khulna)

Solidarity Networks Europe

- Dalit Solidarity Network – UK
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Norway
- Dalit Solidarity Network – Finland
- Dalit Solidarität Deutschland (Germany)

Affiliates

- Association For Dalit Women's Advancement of Nepal
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies – Sri Lanka
- National Dalit Christian Watch - India
- Parittran - Bangladesh

International Associates

- Advocating Rights In South Asia
- Anti-Slavery International
- Asian Centre for Human Rights
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
- Asian Human Rights Commission
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
- Franciscans International
- Human Rights Watch
- ICMICA/Pax Romana
- International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination
- Lutheran World Federation
- Minority Rights Group International
- Robert Kennedy Memorial Foundation, USA
- The Rafto Foundation
- World Council of Churches



IDSN was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSN is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit Solidarity Networks from Europe and organisations in caste-affected countries. IDSN engages with the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral institutions, working for action-oriented approaches to address 'untouchability' and other human rights abuses against Dalits and similar communities that suffer discrimination based on work and descent. IDSN bases its work on contributions from members, associates and affiliates. The network produces crucial input in the form of documentation, strategic interventions and lobby action and also supports national-level lobbying.