



PRESS RELEASE

Utrecht, 1 July 2011

Large majority in Dutch parliament supports motion to combat caste discrimination

Dalit Network Netherlands pleased about Dutch policy support for 250 million Dalits

Yesterday the Dutch Parliament adopted a motion requesting the Minister of Foreign Affairs to continue an active approach to combat caste-based discrimination and improving the position of the roughly 250 million Dalits (so-called 'outcastes') in South Asian countries like India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

An almost two-third majority of Dutch Parliament (95 out of 150 members) of the opposition parties like the Social Democrats, the Christian Union, the GreenLeft Party, the Socialist Party as well as the ruling Christian Democrats, supported the motion. The Dutch Minister of Foreign affairs, Dr. U. Rosenthal, said that he can take the four specific requests in the motion into his policy.

The 'Dalit motion' puts on record that 'Dalits are the victim of countless violations of fundamental human rights and that this group disproportionately suffers from violations of labour rights in the supply chain of Dutch companies, including in garments, seeds and natural stone.

Gerard Oonk, coordinator of the Dalit Network Netherlands, is pleased with the motion and the reaction to it by Minister Rosenthal. 'We have requested the Minister as well as the Parliament to make sure that this huge and profound human rights problem remains a priority in Dutch human rights policy. The Parliament as well as the Minister have now confirmed this clearly'.

EU-India Free Trade Agreement

The Parliament has asked the Minister to raise the issue in the EU, the UN organizations, the World Bank and the IMF. The issue should e.g. be taken up in the ongoing negotiations about the EU-India Free Trade Agreement. At the end of 2010 the Parliament also adopted a motion to include combating caste-based discrimination and child labour in that agreement.

Until recently The Netherlands together with Denmark were actively raising the issue in the EU and the UN Human Rights Council. This possibility for re-engaging in such co-operation has now been confirmed.. A crucial and current issue in this regard is promotion of and global call for endorsement of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent.

The Parliament also requested the Minister to promote that combating caste-based discrimination becomes an integral part of the CSR policy of Dutch and European companies, including in their supply chain, who are active in countries where caste-based discrimination is practised.

Support to the *International Dalit Solidarity Network*

Minister Rosenthal also agreed to the request of the Parliament to continue the financial support of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, a network of Dalit organizations in South Asia and supporting organizations in the rest of the world.

For more information: Gerard Oonk, tel. 06-51015260

The EU-India FTA motion can be found here: <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/m101215e.pdf>

Motion on Dalits – put forward in Dutch Parliament on the 29-6-2011 and adopted on 30-6-2011

The Parliament,

Having heard the deliberations,

Putting on record that the around 250 million Dalits are victim of countless violations of fundamental human rights and that this group disproportionately suffers from violations of labour rights in supply-chains of Dutch companies including in garments, seeds and natural stone;

Putting on record that the International Dalit Solidarity Network plays a crucial role in combating caste-based discrimination but that the intended funding by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following on a bridging subsidy, still seems to be rejected;

Requests the government to raise the issue of caste discrimination in the EU and all relevant international fora, including in the negotiations about the EU-India free trade agreement, UN organizations (including the ILO), the World Bank and the IMF;

Requests the government, in co-operation with Denmark, to continue to raise the issue of caste-based organization in the Human Rights Council, including by speaking out on and gaining support for the adoption of the draft UN Principles against Discrimination Based on Work and Descent in the UN Human Rights Council;

Requests the government to promote that combating caste-based discrimination becomes an integral part of the CSR policy of Dutch and European companies, including in their supply chain, who are active in countries where caste-based discrimination is practised;

Requests the government to continue the funding of the International Dalit Solidarity Platform.

And returns to the order of the day.

Member Voordewind

Reaction of Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Uri Rosenthal

The motion on piece number 8 is about the Dalits. Also on this issue I can be short. In the four operatives I see an approach that the government can work with. In that respect I see the motion as supporting (my) policy and leave it to the judgement of the parliament [whether or not to vote on it]