



For immediate release Dalit Solidarity Network UK Caste Discrimination Sadly is Alive and Well

The Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN) views with interest the recent report by the Hindu Council UK which questions (but does not deny) the existence of caste discrimination in the UK, and blames the British Raj for discrimination in the caste system. It appears to be a thoroughly defensive report, which does not accept in any way that discrimination on grounds of caste is alive and well in the UK today.

This flies in the face of a range of anecdotal evidence given to DSN and to Castewatch UK, the other organisation attacked by the Hindu Council. It denies accounts given in the media, in employment disputes and on other platforms by those affected by caste, including the former Mayor of Coventry. Both Castewatch and the DSN have called for more research to establish the extent of the problem.

It claims that MPs such as Jeremy Corbyn and Rob Marris, both DSN Trustees, have been 'misled' by those who want to convert Hindus to Christianity, and hypothesises an agenda of 'Christian missionary organisations'. It suggests that these and other intelligent MPs, who have long experience of lobbying on a wide variety of causes, are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction.

Commented Jeremy Corbyn, DSN Chair, 'I strongly resent the implication that I and colleagues are gullible Parliamentarians who cannot tell a misleading initiative when we see one. I am not a practising Christian and have no interest whatever in the 'conversion' of Hindus. What I do oppose most vigorously is discrimination by any means, including caste'.

Rob Marris expressed surprise at the criticism, saying: "I have not been misled by anyone. I have publicly stated that the British Raj has a lot to answer for, when it comes to casteism. I have never suggested that caste is integral to Hinduism. It is a perversion of Hinduism. Nor have I ever suggested that casteism is only found in Indian culture. Quite the reverse: I have repeatedly decried casteism around the world, whether in India, Japan, Yemen, parts of Africa, or elsewhere. However, it is wishful thinking to deny that casteism exists in the UK. One only need look at the marriage advertisements in some publications."

DSN Chair of Trustees Revd David Haslam stated, 'The DSN has never attacked Hinduism as such, we have stated our fervent hope that Hinduism can exist without caste and that all right-thinking Hindus will themselves challenge vigorously discrimination by caste. We are very troubled that the Hindu Council should use this report to misrepresent the views of DSN members, both Christian and non-Christian'.

DSN UK is a member of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), whose Council meets next month in Geneva. IDSN has recently concluded a research programme in the five countries of South Asia which describe in detail the ongoing enormously negative effects of caste, affecting up to 300 million people in those countries.

Meena Varma, DSN Director, commented, 'DSN has just become engaged in supporting the campaign by 1.3 million manual scavengers, cleaning the dry toilets of the upper castes in India, for the eradication of this 'worst job in the world' by 2010. We would be delighted if the Hindu Council would join us in seeking to rid India of this shame, and we promise faithfully there will be no attempt to convert them or the manual scavengers. We believe strongly that everyone has the right to their own religious belief'.

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