

DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK UK

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Report highlights 'hidden apartheid'

A report launched tomorrow (Tuesday 22nd April) has concluded that many UK companies have failed to develop policies which will address the problems of caste discrimination.

Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN) has found that despite rapid expansion into South Asia by international companies the problems faced by Dalits (so-called 'untouchables') remain unchallenged. DSN-UK is arguing that caste discrimination is the largest systemic violation of human rights in the world today and many UK companies who invest abroad are ignoring their corporate social responsibilities.

Meena Varma, Director Dalit Solidarity Network UK said: ***"Caste discrimination affects some 300 million people, primarily in India. UK plc is choosing to ignore the abuse and operate within the existing system, therefore merely perpetuating the problems. The Dalit Solidarity Network is challenging UK companies who claim to have an ethical approach to put in place positive policies to address the exclusion and abuse faced by Dalits.***

"Caste discrimination remains the hidden apartheid, and unless urgent action is taken then the Dalit community will remain excluded from ownership of land, denied access to water, education, employment and housing. International companies can not ignore the role they can play, unless they take steps their reputations will be forever tarnished."

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Chair Dalit Solidarity Network UK said: ***"The inhumane treatment of Dalits represents a challenge to companies investing in South Asia. They must acknowledge their corporate social responsibilities and address caste through their employment. The report launched today highlights failures to take steps in acknowledging their contribution to this abusive system. Commitments to diversity and anti-discrimination by companies merely represent cheap PR if they do not take solid steps to question the employment and economic exclusion within the current system"***.

The DSN-UK is calling on companies to sign the Ambedkar Principles of affirmative action for Dalits (see notes to editors)

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- Notes to Editors -

For more information on the Dalit Solidarity Network UK visit: www.dsnuk.org

Report recommendations, companies should:
Companies should:-

1. Endorse the Ambedkar Principles and make it a requirement for their employment agencies and suppliers to do the same and also sign up to the CII Code of Conduct;
2. Ensure their CSR initiatives are caste sensitive and include caste issues in the monitoring and reporting of all policies and audits;
3. If they source from agricultural production, i.e. foodstuffs and textiles, monitor the supply chain to ensure fair and just employment conditions for Dalit workers;
4. If involved in loans and other financing, require lending policies to be so structured that they provide every opportunity for Dalit communities to engage, and monitor the results;
5. Ensure direct and indirect employees (including home workers) are paid the at least minimum wage in their sector, while aiming to pay a living wage within a specific period, e.g. three years.

The study focused on: Shell, Unilever, HSBC, Standard Chartered, Tesco, M&S, Monsoon Accessorize, Cadbury Schweppes

To view the Ambedkar Principles visit: http://www.dsnuk.org/Ambedkar_Principles.htm