

**ASIA  
PARLIAMENTARIANS'  
FORUM ON  
DALIT CONCERNS**



## ABOUT ASIA PARLIAMENTARIANS' FORUM ON DALIT CONCERNS (APFDC)

Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC) is a forum of Parliamentarians from South Asia, who came together with aim to address the issue of discrimination and exclusion faced by the Dalit and excluded communities. APFDC was initially known as South Asian Parliamentary Forum for Dalit Concerns, was renamed at SAARC 2014 Kathmandu. The Forum came together at the South Asian Parliamentarians' Conference on '*Dalit Concerns: Enabling Equity and Inclusion.*'

The Forum works towards addressing issues of discrimination and exclusion through policy intervention, negotiations and political and social action. Further it looks at enhancing opportunities for

Dalit in the region for their right to legal and social entitlements and decent way of living.

APFDC affirms its solidarity with Dalit community world over, especially in the South Asia region. It recognises the historical wrong and discrimination faced by the community at the hands of the upper castes and at times due to state negligence. It further recognises the contribution of the community in freedom struggle against the colonial rule and the *Brahmanical* rule, its role in nation building and cultural development. APFDC commits itself to furthering rights of the community.

# DALIT COMMUNITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Dalit communities make for the most discriminated and excluded community in the world, concentrating in South Asia. About 260 million Dalits globally face discrimination and exclusion in various forms throughout their life. About 210 million Dalit, about 80% of the total Dalit Population world over, resides in the South Asian region alone.

There are both commonalities and differences in the way that caste manifests on the ground across the region, the universal features being *inequality* and *discrimination*. Dalits in all these countries can be easily identified by the 'unclean' occupations they are forced into. Therefore a person sweeping and lifting garbage in public places, cleaning public latrines and sewer lines, dealing with dead bodies of humans and animals, engaging in casual daily wage labour on land and elsewhere generally is a Dalit. They also are distinguished by their segregated living spaces with severely restricted access to public and private services of housing, water and sanitation, health, education, markets, land and employment. As a consequence, there is a large gap between the general population and Dalits in terms of most human development indicators, with Dalit women at the bottom of the scale. Dalit women face further discrimination on the basis of caste and patriarchal values which dominates society in the South Asian countries.

In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Dalit women being categorized under minority community, they face triple discrimination based on caste, gender and religion. Any resistance from the Dalits to undertake occupations assigned to them usually result in violence (ADRF November 2014).

**OVER 210 MILLION DALITS LIVE ACROSS SOUTH ASIA TODAY**

**201 million**  
in India (16.6% of the total Indian population)

**3.5 million**  
in Nepal (13.2% of its total population of 26.5 million)

**3.5 to 6.5 million**  
in Bangladesh (3-4% of total population)

**330,000 million**  
in Pakistan (13.6% of its 2.44 million Hindu minority population)

**4 to 5 million**  
in Sri Lanka (20-30% of total population)

*According to ADRF SDG Document – November 2014*



# PARLIAMENTARIANS AGREEMENT TO FOSTER EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In line with Dr. Ambedkar's approach to Democracy, Parliamentarians coming together to form the forum recognise that they—

- Embody the will of the government.
- Are representatives of the people and voice the needs and demands of the communities.
- They are in a position to enact laws and draft policies for the inclusion of caste

With an agreement on this, Parliamentarians decided to formally come together both at their national level as well as at the regional level in the form of the Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns. The aim of the Forum is to engage with governance institutions and actors in South Asian countries, individually and collectively, to address Dalit concerns in South Asia.

The Forum will enable Parliamentarians from across the region to share knowledge and learning that can strengthen the work being done in their respective countries towards promoting equitable and inclusive growth and development. The Forum's member

**"On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in the social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will recognize the principle of one-man one vote and one vote one value. In our social life and economic life, we shall, by reason of our economic and social structure, continue to deny the principle of one-man one value..."**

**If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this (Constituent) Assembly has so laboriously built up."**

**— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**  
(Writing and Speeches, 2004 (ed.)



Parliamentarians have agreed networking to promote good practices in addressing caste based discrimination and ensuring social justice is a vital step towards fostering peace, and cooperation and development in the region.



## THIS FORUM IS

- To engage the governance institutions and actors of South Asian countries, individually and collectively, to address Dalit concerns in South Asia.
- To enable Parliamentarians from across the region to share knowledge and learning's that can strengthen the work being done in their respective countries towards promoting equitable and inclusive growth and development. The Forum member-Parliamentarians are convinced that national and regional networking
- To promote best practices in addressing caste based discrimination, ensuring equity and social justice, is a vital step towards fostering peace, and cooperation and development in the region.
- Parliamentarians in fostering Equity and Social Justice
- Parliaments are the sanctum sanctorum of democracy. Parliamentarians, as members of this apex democratic institution, embody the will of the people in government. As the key legislative organ,
- Parliaments have the task of adapting laws to rapidly changing national needs and circumstances.
- Parliamentarians to become more representative of their electorates, more accessible and accountable to them, more open and transparent in their procedures, and more effective in their key tasks of legislation and scrutiny of government.
- Parliamentarians to support social justice and equity increasing national attention to the issues of the millions of Dalit, marginalized and excluded people, especially their social exclusion and caste based discrimination that violates basic civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.
- Ensure that there are lawmakers from the socially excluded sections at all levels that, alongside other law-makers, will voice the concerns and interests of the excluded, and actively work to undo the historical wrongs done to them.
- To think lead and act with principles and character.
- To make laws and policies for the inclusion of caste affected communities through affirmative action, prevention of caste-based violence, national action plans.

# MESSAGE FROM THE CONVENOR

Parliaments are the sanctum sanctorum of democracy. Parliamentarians, as members of this apex democratic institution embody the will of the people in government. As the key legislative organ, parliaments have the task of adapting laws to rapidly changing national needs and circumstances.

In South Asia, the last few years have witnessed numerous efforts by parliaments to engage more effectively with the public and to improve the way they work: to become more representative of their electorates, more accessible and accountable to them, more open and transparent in their procedures, and more effective in their key tasks of legislation and scrutiny of government.

The parliamentarians, policy makers, and leaders who support social justice and equity have immensely helped increase national

attention to the issues of Dalit, marginalized and excluded people, especially their social exclusion and caste based discrimination

(CBD) that violates basic civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, adversely affecting millions of people in all aspects of their life.

India and Pakistan (then including East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) had Dalits as their first law ministers. Shri Joginder Nath Mandal was also the first Chairman of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and Dr B R Ambedkar was also the Chairman of the Constitution drafting committee in India. In Nepal, Mr. Meen Bishwakarma was the member of the Interim Constitution Drafting



**Meen Bahadur Bishwakarma**

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. APFDC Meet during SAARC 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

On background of PSAARC 2014, Kathmandu, Nepal, the second official meet of the South Asian Parliamentarian was held. This meet was significant because of the formation of the Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC) with representation from Bangladesh, India,

Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The meet concentrated on Parliamentarians towards working for establishing constitution appropriate provisions against caste discrimination and untouchability (wherever this does not exist), provide legal safeguards to the Dalits to claim equal rights, enact policy to ensure fair share for Dalits in legislature, employment, education and other spheres in public and private enterprises, and

Committee of Nepal in 2007. Similarly, Dr. Madan Pariyar was the Chairman of State Restructuring Commission of Nepal in 2011. Special provisions to ensure social inclusion—both affirmative action and anti-discrimination—are provided in the constitutions of Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

The constitutions ensure that there are lawmakers from the socially excluded sections at all levels, lawmakers who would *'fight tooth and nail for our interest and secure privilege for the under-privileged; people who will undo the wrongs done to our people; people who will voice our grievances fearlessly; people who can think, lead and act; people with principles and character'* to continue this quest. There has been some legal and institutional progress with such support from state leaders and national commitments to make laws and policies for the inclusion of caste affected communities through affirmative

action, prevention of atrocities, national action plans, social security nets and anti-discrimination.

It is time to collectively envision and reiterate what a democratic parliament aspires to in this context. The regional parliamentarians meeting on 8 and 9 December 2013, supported by the European Instrument for Democratic Human Rights Programme of the European Commission, will bring together lawmakers who have demonstrated their commitment to justice and peace from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal along with the community leaders from south Asia, Japan and other parts of the world. They will share experiences, successes and lessons to build stronger cooperation between civil society and national parliaments, regional institutions and parliamentary networks, in a celebration of solidarity.



formulate policy for fair participation of Dalits in policy making and monitoring bodies.

## 2. APFDC-ADRF interventions in New York

Policy Dialogues with European Union Permanent Missions and UK Parliamentarians to United Nations A delegation of the South Asian Parliamentarians and Civil Society Representatives meet with the European Union Permanent Mission to UN on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015, towards building solidarity and support for raising the issue of discrimination based on work and descent (caste) in the UN and inclusion in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The representatives from each countries present the case of dalits in their respective countries to building up the conscious effort towards addressing the issue in a regional context.

The representatives of the missions and the South Asian delegates exchanged information and concerns over the non representation of such a huge chunk of population (or community), which could be calculated as more 3 per cent of the global population. The delegates appealed for raising the issue in structuring the indicators for the SDG implementations.

A delegation of South Asian Parliamentarians and Civil Society Representatives met with the International Development Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2015. The committee monitors the policy, administration and spending of the Department for International Development (DFID) and its associated public bodies and takes an interest in the policies and procedures of the multilateral agencies and non-government organisations to which DFID contributes.







The Committee consists of eleven backbench Members of Parliaments from United Kingdom. The committee promised to take the issue of caste based discrimination in their discussions while re assuring the importance of the progressive slogan propounded by the Sustainable development goals (SDG) of “**leaving no one behind**”. The roundtable exchange resulted in UK parliamentarians ensuring to raise the issue of inclusion of caste and descent based discrimination in SDG (indicators) with UN and the member states. They also supported the issue of elimination of caste based discrimination with constant efforts towards addressing the issue in various international platforms.

## 2. Challenging Systems of Casteism and Racism

APFDC members and civil society leaders engaged in a strategic exchange with African American movements, Latina and other discriminated movements on 23rd September 2015, in Barnard College,

Columbia University. The contemporary historical movement in the US of protest and organizing around racial justice provided an important opportunity for the two movements to share experiences of oppression, particularly that perpetrated by the state, across South Asia and other parts of the world and build collective strategies in activism, and advancing policy. Co-sponsored by the Barnard Center for Research on Women, this discussion provided space to establish synergies towards collective action to address casteism and racism together in a global context, to highlight and build a new internationalism in collective struggles for social and structural justice

## 3. Public Meeting: Educate, Agitate, Organize for Dalit Rights in the 2030 Agenda

South Asian Parliamentarians, Civil society representatives, solidarity organisations and diaspora gathered in Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, opposite to UNGA, for public demonstration and rally during UN



Sustainable Development Summit to address the inclusion of discrimination based on gender, work and descent in implementing the SDGs. More than 150 people joined in the public meeting and protest in front of UN General Assembly, demanding the promise of leaving no one behind and inclusion of caste as variable of exclusion in the SDG.

Parliamentarians and Civil Society representatives with youth activists participated in the programmes including a public performance by the youth and slogans demanding the policies and programs to address these interlinked sites of oppression, through the lens of implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda. Various parliamentarians and key Civil Society leaders have raised their concern of inclusiveness and participatory nature of the SDG agenda in their speeches.

Many calling this to be initial step towards elimination of exclusion and discrimination based on work and descent, and inclusion in the SDG implementation process nationally, regionally and globally.

#### 4. Celebrating 125 Years of Ambedkar's Legacy

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the pioneer and trailblazer of Dalit Rights and equality in South Asia. The Father of Indian Constitution, throughout his life, worked towards gathering equal rights and status to the Dalits and Dalit community. Honouring his legacy on his 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary by garlanding his statue in Lehman's Library, Columbia University, followed by a seminar on the impact of Ambedkar's ideology and legacy in structured elimination of caste based exclusion.

South Asian Parliamentarians, Civil Society representatives, members from Diaspora and Solidarity organizations expressed their perspectives on the influences of Ambedkar's Legacy in formulating the Dalit identity and Dalit rights. Towards addressing inclusiveness of the farthest behind, according to SDGs, there is a need to adopt Ambedkar's ideology of eliminating

the bias through targeted policies and budgets for inclusion and participation in the developmental process. There should be a conscious effort towards ensuring accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion in national, regional and global (UN) level for true and successful implementation of the 2030 developmental goals.

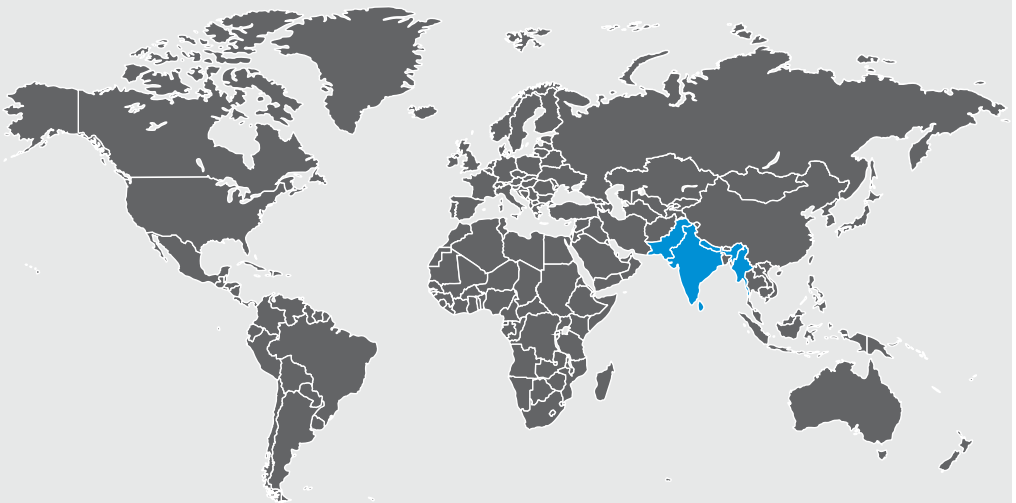
## MEMBERS

**Convenor: Mr. Meen Biswakarma, Nepal**

**Co-Convenor:** Md. Israfil Alam, Bangladesh

**Co-Convenor:** Dr. B.L. Mungekar, India

### Member Countries



Bangladesh ● India ● Nepal ● Pakistan ● Sri Lanka

## Member Parliamentarians

- Fazilatun Nasa Bappy,**  
Member of Parliament, Bangladesh
- Manoranjan Shill Gopal,**  
Member of Parliament, Bangladesh
- Mazmul Haq Prodhon,**  
Member of Parliament, Bangladesh
- Nurjahan Begum,**  
Member of Parliament, Bangladesh
- Ramdas Athawale,**  
Member of Parliament, India
- Udit Raj,**  
Member of Parliament, India
- Selja Kumari,**  
Member of Parliament, India
- Suresh Kudikunnil,**  
Member of Parliament, India
- Jitu Gautam,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Daljeet Sripali,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Kamala Bishwakarma,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Ramani Devi Ram,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Bishnu Maya Pariyar,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Aasha Bishwakarma,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Aphilal Okheda,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Dulari Harijan,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Kumari Teku Nepali,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Sarada Kumari Biswakarma,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Man Bahadur Bishwakarma,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Sujata Pariyar,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Naravan Kami,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Siva Kumari Gotame,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Dil Bahadur Nepali,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Anita Pariyar,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Sima Kumari Bishwakarma,**  
Member of Constituent Assembly, Nepal
- Poonjo Bheel,**  
Member of Senate, Pakistan
- Gian Chand,**  
Member of Senate, Pakistan
- Thilakarajah Mylvaganam,**  
Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka
- Palani Digambaran,**  
Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka

## Contact Details

### Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns

Regional Office- Bangladesh (Nagorik Uddyog)  
House # 8/14, Block-B, Lalmatia, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh  
Telephone: +88 02 8115868, Fax: 9141511

### Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns

Regional Office- India (Swadhikar)  
8/1, 2nd Floor, South Patel Nagar, New Delhi- 110008  
Contact no.: +91 11 25842249, 45668341, Fax +91 11 25842250

### Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns

Regional Office-Nepal (Samata Foundation)  
Sanepa-2, Lalitpur, Nepal P.O. Box: 6330  
Tel. No. +977 1 5520851, 5521715