



ASIA DALIT RIGHTS FORUM

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Over 210 million people live across Asia today who face discrimination based on work and descent; that is, basis of their birth into certain castes/social groups and their traditional 'unclean' occupations of the lowest status. They 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 populations facing discrimination based on work and descent in terms of most human development indicators, with women from the discriminated communities at the bottom of the scale. In addition, in many of the affected countries persons facing discrimination based on work and descent also are targeted for severe forms of violence based on their excluded identity, often with impunity.

Despite clear evidence of social exclusion, however, comprehensive government measures to tackle discrimination based on work and descent (caste) have been largely absent in the region, and where created, poorly enforced. While the United Nations draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent have been promulgated, adequate attention has not been paid to translating these guidelines and the international human rights laws on which they are based, into a set of national measures to tackle this widespread problem and to ensure human rights to all those facing such discrimination. It is against this background that Dalits across the Asia region have been organising and coming together at the regional level in order to build solidarity and forge common strategies to combat discrimination based on work and descent.

ADRF is a platform of Dalits and those working with Dalits in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka:

- **committed to the empowerment and emancipation of communities** subjected to descent and work based (caste based) discrimination and violence (DWDV).
- **aiming at addressing violations of the rights and entitlements** of these communities, in particular their women and children, in the respective countries as well as collectively in Asia.
- **supporting all those communities subjected to DWDV in any part of the world** in their noble aspirations and courageous struggles to establish an inclusive society that is marked by equity and equality, dignity and self-governance, justice and freedom.
- **committed to collaborating with all national and international agencies** - civil society organizations and human rights agencies, UN bodies and state institutions espousing the cause of eliminating DWDV and building an inclusive and egalitarian society in Asia, Africa, Europe, and elsewhere in the world.

Origin and Growth

Background

ADRF has had an eventful history spanning through a decade and half (1998-2014) time line. In 2001, the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) at Durban, South Africa challenged the conscience of humankind against racist and other forms of inequality. WCAR opened a powerful political space in Durban for the strong civil society contingent from different countries in the Asia region, whose loud and clear call for a **“Caste and Untouchability Free World”** exposed to the world the hidden apartheid of the insidious caste system in South Asia and elsewhere. One protest slogan **“Cast Out Caste”** caught the imagination of various sectors of the global population - progressive human rights activists and social intellectuals, media pundits and donor partners, UN agencies and international governments.

Then with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) - **India** initiating the formation of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), the issue of Dalit rights and entitlements took on public political visibility and global official recognition, there were several interventions at the global level and various international mechanisms were utilised to address the issue of Caste. However, the time had come to further strengthen and drive the agency of the Dalit community and as a result the need to form ADRF.

The active involvement of Dalit Organisations in **Bangladesh** (Bangladesh Dalit and other Excluded Rights Movement, Nagorik Uddyog), **in Nepal** (Feminist Dalit Organisation, Dalit NGO Federation, Jagaran Media Centre, Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization, Dalit Parliament, Samata Foundation, Rashtriya Dalit Network, Dalit National Federation), in **Pakistan** (Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network) in **Sri Lanka** (Human Development Organisation), in **Japan** (Buraku Liberation League), and the International Movement Against Dalit Rights (IMADR) – all these have further strengthened the need for a collective effort in Asia.

Eventually this necessitated the creation of the **Asia Dalit Rights Movement (ADRF)** as a collective platform at Asia level. The rationale lay in the contiguity of the Asian region countries, and the commonality of the systemic nature of discrimination and violence suffered by the peoples living in this region.

Emerging Solidarity Platform (2004-13)

Genesis of ADRF: The idea of **ADRF**, as a collective platform of Dalit rights protagonists, emerged during the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India in 2004 and was consolidated in the events for Dalit Rights activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the India Social Forum, Delhi in 2006. Greater clarity of perspective emerged as Dalit rights

activists again came together at the Karachi Social Forum, Pakistan in 2007.

Advocacy with UN Bodies at Geneva: ADRF acquired strength as a solidarity platform to do advocacy with UN bodies and various States Parties at the international level at Geneva in 2007 on behalf of the Descent and Work based Discriminated peoples in the South Asia region and in the global diaspora.

The Bangkok Conclave: ADRF organized a Strategic Planning Meet in Bangkok in 2007 with the support of Forum-Asia. A Coordinator was appointed to set the network in motion. This ADRF conclave was a significant milestone and helped to expand its reach by establishing a stronger working relationship with Buraku Liberation League (BLL) of Japan and IMADR and to engage with the governments in South Asia for making responsive policy changes and interventions at the global level through existing human rights mechanisms.

Decade of Dalit Rights: In June 2011, several members of the ADRF organized a

week of Decade of Dalit Rights to review the existing situation, stock taking of the past and strategizing interventions for the future as well as advocacy with Special Rapporteurs and Country Missions in Geneva.

Envisaging a Formal Structure for long term future: In subsequent years, the phase of interactions in Geneva for sharing work experiences in the respective countries and deliberating on UN advocacy efforts in close collaboration with IDSND moved into a new era of journey: ADRF members felt the need to evolve a formal network.

Launching ADRF Collective (2014)

The one and half decade of interactions, experiences and achievements led the ADRF partners to give a formal organizational structure to the collective platform at the Kathmandu Consultation of Feb. 26-27, 2014. **The founding member organizations made a unanimous decision to formalize the platform as Asian Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF).**

ADRF Objectives

- to address the concerns and claims, rights and entitlements of the communities subjected to descent and work based (caste based) discrimination and violence in their respective Asian countries
- to articulate their concerns across Asia in relevant forums, including SAARC and ESCAP
- to place their demands in the international fora – UN agencies, EU, international governments, international human rights organizations, etc.
- to forge strong partnership with similar platforms and networks in Africa, Europe, America and in the regions of the Diaspora Communities discriminated on basis of descent and work.

Founding Members

- BANGLADESH** Bangladesh Dalit and other Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM), Nagorik Uddyog (NU)
- INDIA** National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), Navsarjan Trust
- NEPAL** Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO), Dalit NGO Federation,

Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO), Dalit Parliament, Samata Foundation, Jagaran Media Centre, Rashtriya Dalit Network (RDN), Dalit National Federation (DNF)

PAKISTAN Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN)

SRI LANKA Human Development Organisation (HDO)

Organizational Structure

- ADRF is composed of General Council (GC) with 21 members and Executive Committee (EC) with 11 members.
- The posts of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will be held on country-wise rotation and they will be from different countries.
- The principle of gender ratio will be followed regarding these two positions.
- The method of selection will be in the manner of one of the members being proposed by someone from among the GC members, seconded by another person and then approved by consensus of the GC.
- The Forum has an Advisory Body.
- NCDHR has taken the lead for the first term.



Office Bearers

Chairperson

Paul Divakar

Vice-Chairperson

Durga Sob

Executive Committee

Asha Kowtal, Bhakta Biswakarma, Durga Sob, Manjula Pradeep, Moni Rani Das, P. Logeswary, Paul Divakar, Ramesh Jaipal, Siva Pragasam, SonoKhangharani, Zakir Hossain.

Advisory Body

Aloysius Irudayam s.j.

Areas of Involvement

1. **Strengthening Dalit and Dalit Women civil society formations at country level** to safeguard and promote Dalit community rights and entitlements
2. **Forging Asia and Africa regional strategic networks** for influencing policy country level and regional level policy changes in favour of Dalit community rights and entitlements
3. **Strengthening lateral linkages at South Asia level** to intervene in appropriate regional level political and government forums
4. **Strengthening South Asia Region Parliamentarians Forum** in support of their interaction with country level Parliamentarians in view of bringing in policy changes
5. **Building a data base/knowledge pool of informational resources** covering descent and work based discriminated communities in South Asia, Asia, Africa and in diaspora regions
6. **Engaging country-wise and regional level media agencies** for promoting the cause of the communities

Programmatic Activities

1. **Fact-finding...** on issues of caste based discrimination and violence having a significant bearing on concerned country or the whole of South Asia and Asia region, with follow-up national, regional and international governmental interventions
2. **Capacity development...** to equip DWD communities with ideas and skills and to generate solidarity feelings among them cutting across all regional boundaries
3. **Research...** on a range of rights and entitlements denied to descent-work based discriminated (DWD) communities across the region for advocacy purposes resulting policy changes
4. **Publications...** newsletters, magazines, documents, research materials
5. **Discourses...** organizing events in the nature of conferences and consultations, seminars and workshops with a view to exchange ideas and experiences, change mindsets and prejudices, forge solidarity efforts, influence policy decisions in country and regional level
6. **Networking...** forging alliances and building coalitions at different levels: regional inter-community, civil society organizations, parliamentary and judiciary institutions, civil administrative institutions
7. **Campaign...** for disseminating information to keep DWD communities and civil society informed, creating public opinion in view of policy changes
8. **Social Media & Mass Media Networking...** to make claims of rights and entitlements of DWD communities forcefully, to disseminate ideas and information on critical issues, to create public opinion, to influence policy making institutions, to demand state transparency and accountability
9. **Advocacy & Lobbying...** with governance institutions in respective countries and with regional political formations and institutions
10. **Generating financial resources...** from DWD communities, well-wishers, governmental institutions, etc.



Offices

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*While the Permanent Secretariat is in Kathmandu, Nepal, the Camp Office will change according to the Chairperson's country location.