

# Asian 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.

**Member Countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**  
**Convenor: Meen Bahadur Bishwasharma**  
**Co-Convenor: Md. Ishrafil Alam**

*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** in Pakistan (13.6% of its 2.44 million Hindu minority population)  
**4 to 5 million** in Sri Lanka (20-30% of total population)

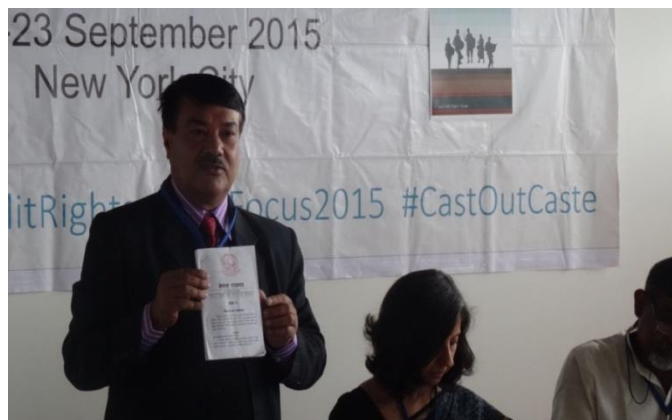
*According to ADRF SDG Document –November 2014*

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 faces 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 the 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).



### **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.
- ❖ 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.



## Previous Activities

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

### 2. APFDC-ADRF interventions in New York

#### 1. Policy Dialogues with European Union Permanent Missions 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.

#### 2. Policy Dialogues with UK International Development Committee

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 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.

**3. ADRF has organized a Public Rally: Cast Out Caste in front of United Nations General Assembly on 26th September 2015 in New York demanding recognition and inclusion of Caste in the 2030 SDG agenda.**

***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. 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.

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