

**A Statement made to the Working Group on Minority on the 8th of August 2006 at the UN, Geneva**

Mr. Chair person, members of the Working Group on Minority, UN country desk officers, country representatives and all present here, first of all I, **Ezhil Vandana from the National Federation of Dalit Women, India** would like to thank the Working Group on Minority for having given me this opportunity to voice out the situations, concerns and demands of Dalit women in India.

Mr. Chair person, the Dalit women who constitute 16.3 % of the total Indian female population are experiencing discrimination, violence, exclusion and isolation due to caste hierarchy and untouchability on the one hand and extreme deprivation and poverty on the other, coupled with political, legal and religio-cultural discrimination.

Caste based discrimination, aggressive communalism and economic marginalization have meant the denial of the freedom to live without fear, threat and intimidation and substantive denial of equality before the law. Dalit women are victims of caste and gender violence, used by landlords, middlemen, contractors and policemen to "inflict" political lessons and crush protests, struggle and dissent. Dalit Women are raped before being massacred and used as hostages to punish absconding male members in the family. Dalit women being "the downtrodden among the downtrodden", have been denied for centuries a space for utterance. Dalit women lag behind with respect to a number of development indicators.

The Government Of India, being signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention to Eliminate Racial Discrimination (CERD), has failed to fulfill its International as well Constitutional guarantees and promises to the Dalit community and its women since its independence.

Mr. Chairperson, I would like to present on behalf of the Dalit women a few recommendations to the UN Human Rights bodies:

- The Human rights treaty monitoring bodies in particular CERD, CEDAW, CRC, CAT, ICESCR and the Human Rights Committee should pay special attention to human rights violations against dalits especially women when examining periodic reports of concerned countries and should take into account the recommendations of the dalit communities when formulating their concluding observations, comments and recommendations.
- The UN Human Rights Bodies must take every opportunity to raise the issue of caste and decent-based discrimination with the Indian government and encourage enactment and implementation of laws

- ❖ Evolve a National Labour Policy for the unorganised sector, and extend social security especially agricultural labour where the majority of Dalit women are concentrated, to protect workers' rights.
- ❖ Ensure Dalit women equal access without caste or gender discrimination to healthcare and social security services.
- ❖ Ensure that the fundamental rights of Dalit women are protected in all situations, and that swift measures are taken to bring justice to Dalit women whose rights have been violated as per the law.
- ❖ Evolve a strategy to appoint such as a Special Rapporteur to expose the abhorrent and discriminatory practice of Devadasi (slaves of God) or Jogin system and Manual Scavenging, and to take adequate steps to end such practices against Dalit Women by providing alternate work, livelihood and social security measures that will take care of these women's life subsistence.

I would like to conclude by thanking everyone present here for this opportunity.