

STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session of Bangladesh
Geneva, 28 August to 1 September 2023
Delivered by: Probir Sircar from Parittran

Subject: Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pre-session Statement on Dalit Human Rights in Bangladesh.

1 – Presentation of the Organisation

Thank you, Honourable Delegates, for the opportunity to submit this statement ahead of UPR session. I want to draw your attention to the vital issue of caste discrimination and Dalit human rights in Bangladesh. ‘Dalits’ are those outside of the caste system, and face discrimination in almost every aspect of our lives due to our caste.

My name is Probir Sircar, I am a member of the Dalit community, and I am working with the organisation called Parittran. This is the first time that a Dalit has been given the opportunity to present at the UPR pre-session for Bangladesh.

I am reading this statement on behalf of Parittran and the International Dalit Solidarity Network. Parittran is Dalit grassroot organization and has been working since 1993 to establish Dalits’ rights and dignity. It is led by the Dalits for the Dalits and operates campaign programs in 54 districts.

2 – National consultations for the drafting of the national report

IDSN, Parittran, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, DALIT and Nagorik Uddog jointly submitted a report to the UPR on March 2023, which is based on ongoing consultations with the Dalit community since 2018.

3 – Plan of the statement

The statement addresses (1) the “Anti-Discrimination Bill of 2022” as Bangladesh does not have explicit legislation combatting caste discrimination, and (2) Dalit political participation, including the mainstreaming strategy plan and reserve seats.

Statement I. The Anti-Discrimination Bill of 2022

A. Follow-up to the third cycle review

In the previous cycle some states have already raised this issue.

B. New developments since the first review

Dalits have been oppressed by dominant groups in society while the majority are underprivileged and struggle for job opportunities. We are often forced to undertake jobs considered to be ‘unclean’ in urban areas such as shoe polishing, street sweeping, manual scavenging and burying dead bodies. Many Dalits are stigmatised as a result of their job and isolated and excluded. This Bill could change the discriminatory practices by prohibiting these acts. The Anti-Discrimination Bill of 2022 is waiting to be passed by Parliament.

C. Recommendations

- In order to demonstrate the government's commitment to abolishing discrimination change the title to "The Elimination and Abolition of Discrimination Act".
- Define Dalits or marginalized communities who are discriminated against as untouchable and who the law should protect.
- Prohibit the use of discriminatory sayings and disrespectful words both on and offline against Dalits (especially in media and textbooks).
- Make discrimination against Dalits a punishable offence in the Penal Code.

Statement II. Facilitate Dalits' political participation by fostering the Dalit Mainstreaming Strategy Plan and include reserve seats for Dalits

A. Follow-up to the third cycle review

There have been insufficient recommendations on Dalit issues despite Dalits being about 5.5 million of the population, and are often the most vulnerable and marginalized. Two recommendations and questions directly addressed Dalits and lower castes in 2018, however, these were not accepted.

B. New developments since the last review

Dalit people lack political empowerment and are not represented at any level of the current political parties, so key issues for my community are left out or unspoken. However, since the shadow report was submitted in April, the Bangladesh government has been doing consultations on the Dalit Mainstreaming Strategy Plan, as well talking about a provision to include reserved seats for Dalits. As the Dalit community lags behind mainstream people and has no way to address our issues, this strategy paper and reserve seats are important to bring Dalits to equality.

C. Recommendations

1. Ensure the representation of Dalits in Government standing committees and all social political committees and forums at the micro, macro and central level.
2. Reserve at least 5% seats for Dalits in local and national governments.
3. Develop a milestone and strategy paper for Dalit mainstreaming and Dalit development.

I will be here in Geneva for the next few days, please do come and speak with us if you have any further questions.