

US: Protect freedom of expression at UN for human rights organisation fighting caste-discrimination

25.03.2015

The US should use its position as a member of a United Nations committee that accredits non-governmental organisations to support the International Dalit Solidarity Network to obtain special consultative status with the UN and thus protect its right to express its views regarding the elimination of caste-based discrimination.



(New York) - The United States should use its position as a member of a United Nations committee that accredits non-governmental organisations to support the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) to obtain special consultative status with the UN and thus protect its right to express its views regarding the elimination of caste-based discrimination, fifteen leading civil society organisations, said in an [open letter to the US Secretary of State](#) today.

'After seven years of waiting, IDSN deserves to receive a definitive response to its request for UN consultative status,' said Michelle Evans of the International Service for Human Rights. 'We call on the United States to take a leadership role in the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs to ensure this happens.'

The Committee on NGOs, an intergovernmental body tasked with considering the applications of NGOs for consultative status (which is required to attend and participate in many UN meetings), often deviates from UN guiding principles in its handling of applications of credible and deserving human rights NGOs. This is because the majority of States on the Committee do not support a vibrant and diverse civil society and often oppose organisations whose views they do not agree with. States use various tactics to block these organisations, including asking repetitive questions that frequently go beyond the scope of what NGOs are required to submit with their application.

'As a result of its continuous deferrals of applications through perpetual questioning, the Committee fails to fulfil its core mandate of giving a voice to NGOs, including IDSN, a reputable and prominent NGO that works globally for the elimination of caste-based discrimination, a significant human rights problem of high relevance to the UN,' said Ms Evans.

In the letter, civil society organisations (including ISHR, Human Rights Watch and FORUM-ASIA) cite concerns of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of assembly and association on the handling of the IDSN case. In his [2014 report to the UN General Assembly](#), the independent expert criticised India, a long-standing Committee member, for arbitrarily blocking IDSN from obtaining consultative status, calling its actions 'clearly unacceptable, wrong and unfair'. The UN expert also highlighted the obligations of multilateral organisations and member States to promote and protect the rights of everyone to access and communication with international human rights mechanisms.

'India's actions in the NGO Committee amount to a violation of the rights to freedom of expression and association, not only undermining the integrity and credibility of the UN, but also hindering the proper functioning of the UN mechanisms which rely on the free flow of information from civil society, including from IDSN,' said Ms Evans.

Along with other prominent human rights organisations, ISHR calls on the United States to uphold the legal obligation to strengthen civil society participation and to promote and protect fundamental rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression by supporting IDSN to obtain consultative status.

Contact: Michelle Evans, New York Advocacy Manager, International Service for Human Rights on m.evans@ishr.ch