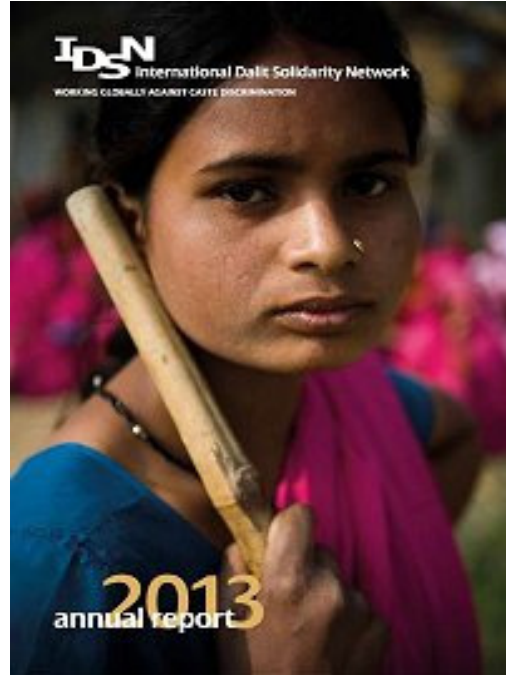


## **Report Dalit Network Netherlands 2013**

***Despite some encouraging remarks by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs in the budget session of December 2012 and positive – though short and restrained – answers to various parliamentary questions in 2013, it seems that the Dalit issue is now receiving less priority from the Ministry.***

This trend became particularly visible after the National Dutch human rights award was given to a Dalit activist from Tamil Nadu who is – falsely, say human rights organisations – accused of murder. The award winner, Dalit human rights activist Marimuthu Bharathan, could not be present at the award ceremony in January, as he was not given a passport by the Indian authorities. The DNN coordinator read out part of the acceptance speech on his behalf. The award ceremony received substantial publicity in the Dutch media<sup>(1)</sup>, and the Chair of the Jury, Cisca Dresselhuys, noted in her speech that “the Indian government was not really happy with the message. [...] There was a warning that the good relations between The Netherlands and India could be significantly harmed if the award went to Mr. Bharathan”<sup>(2)</sup>.



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On a more positive note, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frans Timmermans, did discuss the Dalit issue with his Indian counterpart during a visit to India in November. The Dutch government is also supporting some Dalit-related projects.

There is also increased attention to Dalits as a discriminated and exploited group in the supply chain of Dutch and multinational companies. This issue was highlighted in various meetings in The Netherlands, Norway and Denmark with DNN participation, and also covered in media reports on labour rights violations and discrimination in the garment and seed industry in India. The co-ordinator of DNN briefed around 30 companies participating in a trade mission to India that also brought up the Dalit issue. There will probably be more opportunities in the coming years to bring up the Dalit issue in relation to one of the Dutch human rights priorities, including human rights defenders, position of women, child labour and – not the least CSR and fundamental labour rights.

In 2013, DNN continued its political advocacy and lobby toward the Dutch Parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through letters and meetings with a number of MPs and officials from the Ministry. The work has resulted in various parliamentary questions, remarks during parliamentary debates and responses by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Two series of parliamentary questions raised the issue of sexual violence against Dalit women and the shrinking space of civil society in India. Mr Timmermans answered that his government was “making efforts to ensure that the topic discrimination based on work and descent continues to receive attention on the agenda of the EU and UN.” He also expressed support for the resolution of the European Parliament on violence against women in India.

In another written question regarding a new policy paper on human rights, Parliament asked how The Netherlands would “give priority to the roughly 300 million Dalits (‘outcastes’), especially in South Asia, who are victims of violations related to all these issues, as the Parliament has also expressed in its resolution of 29 June 2011?” The answer was rather restrained: “National legislation for the protection of Dalits is sufficiently available, but following up of this legislation often still runs into inadequate local implementation especially in rural areas. The recently adopted resolution about the position of Dalits gives clear recommendations for the EU human rights policy.”

There was continued media attention to the issue of bonded labour and exploitation of (mainly) Dalit girls in the Indian textile and garment industries. The latest media publication in 2013 was a long investigative article in the progressive US Magazine ‘Mother Jones’ (circulation in print: more than 200.000) – to which DNN member the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) and its partners in Tamil Nadu contributed. The caste element of the exploitation was highlighted in this article.

A large number of articles were published on DNN’s Dutch and English website [www.dalits.nl](http://www.dalits.nl). Many of these were translated from articles published by IDSIN. DNN briefed several journalists on the Dalit issue and published an opinion article. The website had 61,030 visits, an approximate rise of 12 per cent compared to 2012. Information on Dalits was distributed regularly to around 6,000 organizations, policy makers and persons internationally and in The Netherlands through ICN’s India Newsletter. The English version was published 13 times in 2013 and the Dutch version 18 times <sup>(3)</sup>.

DNN focused specifically on the issue of Dalit women in public meetings, articles, letters to Parliament and in interaction with MPs and journalists. A Dalit woman who has worked in a spinning mill and is now an activist against the Sumangali system of bonded labour spoke at a meeting organised by ICN. DNN is finalising a Dutch language brochure on violence against Dalit women.

Work on the issue of CSR and Dalits continued in 2013. DNN coordinator Gerard Oonk was the keynote speaker at a seminar in Oslo on labour and caste, and he spoke at a meeting in Copenhagen on Dalits and CSR and a seminar in Brussels on slavery and labour rights. ICN and DNN also included the issue of caste discrimination in a number of publications and activities around supply chains of both the textile/garment and the seed industry in India.

ICN/DNN has contributed to IDSIN activities in the context of the EU and UN lobby/advocacy work by regularly informing Dutch MEPs and other EU officials about the Dalit issue and by carrying out lobby activities in the Human Rights Council with the IDSIN team.

In 2013, DNN made a Dutch version of the IDSIN introductory film on caste discrimination, *We are not untouchable*. The network published reports, brochures and around 50 articles on the Dalit issue.

- (1) <http://www.dalits.nl/130109e.html>
- (2) [http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/SpeechCiscaDresselhuys\\_e.pdf](http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/SpeechCiscaDresselhuys_e.pdf)
- (3) <http://www.indianet.nl/indianews-archive.html>