



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)  
LEGAL AID BOARD

## **Bangladesh - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 3 September 2010**

### **Information on the caste system**

In 2008 the *International Dalit Solidarity Network* states:

“Both the Muslim majority and Hindu minority in Bangladesh have a hierarchical caste system with discrimination, exclusion and practices of untouchability against both Hindu Dalits and Muslim Dalits” (International Dalit Solidarity Network (2008) *Dalits of Bangladesh: Destined to a life of humiliation*,p.7).

The *Indian Institute of Dalit Studies* in 2009 states:

“It is evident from the study that major population of Dalits in both Hindu and Muslim communities face discrimination in almost all spheres of life. Their access to essential amenities is severely limited and discriminated” (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (2009) *Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh*,p.51).

The *International Dalit Solidarity Network* in February 2009 reports:

“The main recommendation in this submission is that the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) should enforce constitutional measures and enact specific legislation to address caste-based discrimination, estimated to affect between 3.5 to 5.5 million people in Bangladesh. Caste systems and prejudice against so-called “untouchables” are traditionally regarded as part of Hindu culture and certainly originate in Hindu scriptures; but in Bangladesh these traditions and practices have also been adopted by sections of the Muslim majority. In Bangladesh, members of the “low castes” increasingly refer to themselves as Dalits – the “downtrodden” people – to emphasise the fact that they have been exploited, oppressed and excluded through generations. Dalits are perceived as a broader category of people which include regional and local variations distinguishable by profession, e.g. robidas (cobblers) rishis (leather workers), shobdokars (drum beaters), etc” (International Dalit Solidarity Network (February 2009) *Joint NGO Submission by Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, Nagorik Uddyog and the International Dalit Solidarity Network, Related to Bangladesh for the 4th UPR session, February 2009, The human rights situation of Dalits in Bangladesh, their socio-economic problems, legal and constitutional protections, and the issues of discrimination on the basis of caste and lower status*,p.2).

A *Human Rights Watch* article in October 2009 states:

“Governments in countries with caste systems should respond to the call from a top UN official to end this form of discrimination, Human Rights Watch, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), and the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) said today. The organizations urged governments in South Asia and other regions to

cooperate with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, who has issued a strong call to end caste discrimination. In an opinion article, Pillay stated that "the time has come to eradicate the shameful concept of caste," and called on the international community to come together "as it did when it helped put an end to apartheid." She argued that "other seemingly insurmountable walls, such as slavery and apartheid, have been dismantled in the past" and concluded that "we can and must tear down the barriers of caste too." "Governments in India and other caste-affected countries should support the new UN framework to eliminate caste discrimination," said Rikke Nöhrind, coordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network. "It is time for these nations to cooperate with the UN to address a human rights issue that affects 260 million people." The high commissioner's strong stance has been welcomed by Dalit rights groups, particularly in South Asia. As many as 200 million victims of caste discrimination live in India. Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka also have sizeable Dalit populations, and communities in Africa, Yemen, and Japan are similarly affected" (Human Rights Watch (9 October 2009) *Time to Tear Down the Wall of Caste*).

The *United Nations Human Rights Council* in July 2010 reports:

"The experts met with groups of people who identify themselves as Dalits. The caste system was described as an occupational system, whereby people, according to their descent, undertake certain professions that are generally considered to be menial. The experts were informed that these people suffer discrimination in all areas of life, including segregation in their access to housing. Most live beneath the poverty line, earn less than the minimum wage and have no access to education. Dalits also suffer from numerous diseases, not least because of their lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and they sometimes face discrimination in their access to public-health facilities" (United Nations Human Rights Council (22 July 2010) *Joint report of the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, and the independent expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation: Mission to Bangladesh (A/HRC/15/55)*,p.7).

## References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

## **Sources Consulted**

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