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| Call to Protect Dalit Rights during Pandemic  |
| By: International Alliance for Social Justice  |
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**Global Call for Protecting Dalit Rights During COVID-19 Pandemic**

We, the global alliance of Dalit organizations, strongly urge the Member-States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), United Nations, civil society, and donor agencies to provide immediate relief to poor Dalits and protect their basic human rights during COVID-19 pandemic. We furthermore call upon the States to ensure that the emergency measures are proportionate, non-discriminatory, and are fully aligned with international human rights law and standards principles.

In South Asia, 170 million Dalits live a life of servitude, deprivation, and discrimination. The majority of Dalits work in the informal service sector, mostly in lowest-level jobs, relying on daily wages. The lockdowns in most South Asian states have left Dalits suffer from hunger, deprived from having access to health services, information, and more importantly food.

As well know that the virus does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, political ideology and any other affiliations. And it hurts us all, but affects more to the poor, vulnerable and the politically and economically marginalized communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic will undeniably test the capacity for crisis mitigation and the response of governments and will potentially ravage every society. We are concerned, however, of countries and communities where overt caste and descent-based discriminations are present and where economic capacities and social capitals are fragile, making them more vulnerable to the impact of the outbreak, and possibly exacerbating existing discrimination in distributing immediate relief.

All efforts must be expedited to contain the pandemic and find durable solutions to this common problem. An inclusive approach will allow immediate relief to reach the most vulnerable Dalit communities and can provide an opportunity to address the issues and coordination for an emergency response without further delay. Resources must be directed preventing further damage to those who have already in deprived conditions. In line with this aim, States and other relief providers must ensure that human rights and social justice are at the heart of their response.

We further call on the States, civil society organizations, and other relief providers to initiate and facilitate the space for inclusive coordination and immediate relief to the most excluded Dalits. This is the moment for State mechanisms including civil society organizations to act as a “vulnerable people centred,” caring and sharing community.

**Thus, we call on States, civil society and relief providers to take the following measures without delay:**

1. Provide immediate special relief package to the most disadvantaged Dalit community who are in dire need of relief due to continuous lockdown in several South Asian countries like Nepal and India. Mostly the Dalits are engaged in the informal service sector and rely on daily wages work and employment and their living condition has become worst of all due to the lockdowns.

2. Immediately stop police brutality and take legal actions against those who committed violence against Dalits and gender-based violence against Dalit women during the pandemic.

3. Ensure human rights friendly environment at the quarantine sites and centres. The support will require to avoid any forms of discriminations and stigmatization.

4. Allocate adequate resources to ensure human rights-based approach, non-discrimination, transparency, and respect for human dignity in the delivery of health services and relief, regardless of caste and economic statuses.

5. Provide utmost attention to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable Dalits such as their access to health services, protective equipment like face masks, and to immediate testing, quality medical care, and social protection.

6. Ensure that Dalit issues are included while developing long-term strategies and early recovery package to respond to socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. We urge to adopt inclusive measures mainly to include Dalit representative in any local to national level crisis response mechanisms including similar mechanism of civil society and other relief providers.

8. Provide access to authentic and easy access to information on the COVID-19 virus considering the immediate needs of raising community sensitization among vulnerable Dalits.

9. Ensure that declarations of state of emergencies, community-quarantines, lockdowns, and restriction of freedom of movement do not come at the expense of the right to freedom of expression.

10. Ensure that the crisis response abides by the existing standards and principles of international human rights.

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