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'UNTOUCHABILITY': THE ECONOMIC EXCLUSION OF THE DALITS IN INDIA

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The caste system is an economic order. It prevents someone from owning land or receiving an education. It is a vicious cycle and an exploitative economic arrangement. Landowning patterns and being a high-caste member are coterminous. Also there is a nexus between [being] lower-caste and landlessness... Caste is a tool to perpetuate exploitative economic arrangements.

– Chairman, Tamil Nadu Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, India, 1998

In much of South Asia and India in particular, caste has become coterminous with race in the definition and exclusion of distinct population groups because of their descent. For one hundred and sixty million Dalits or 'untouchables' at the bottom of India's caste system – a population on par with that of Russia or Brazil – the exclusion extends to the economic realms of wages, jobs, education, and land. Despite formal protections in law, discriminatory treatment remains endemic and discriminatory societal norms continue to be reinforced by government and private structures, often through violent means.

Dalits are denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of the police and of higher-caste groups that enjoy the state's protection. In what has been called India's "hidden apartheid," entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by caste. Untouchability endures as a cover for exploitative economic relationships and the caste system survives a cruel and efficient economic order.

Under constitutional provisions and various laws, the state grants Dalits a certain number of privileges, including reservations (quotas) in education, government jobs, and government bodies. National and state legislation also outlaw the practice of bonded labour and manual scavenging, set ceilings on a single landowner's holdings, allocate surplus government lands to Dalit and tribal populations, and criminalise the practice of 'untouchability' and other atrocities against low-caste communities.

The government has also attempted to increase the self-sufficiency of the scheduled-caste¹ population through financial assistance for self-employment activities and through development programs designed to increase education and skills. Protective measures are monitored by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Development measures for the educational, social, and economic uplifting of scheduled castes are administered by the Department of Welfare.

Despite this large body of legislation and administrative agency mandates assigned exclusively to deal with the plight of scheduled castes, the laws have benefited few and, due to a lack of political will, development programs and welfare projects designed to improve economic conditions for Dalits have generally had little effect. Although the constitutional abolition of 'untouchability' in 1950 meant that upper-caste Hindus could no longer segregate Dalits or force them to perform any 'polluting' occupation, caste prejudice and corruption within the police and judiciary have effectively ensured that atrocities against Dalits go unpunished, that land reforms remain unimplemented, and that prohibitions on bonded labour and manual scavenging remain unenforced. Upper-caste threats of physical abuse and social boycotts for refusing to perform demeaning tasks also ensure preservation of the economic status quo.

Any strategy to combat racial discrimination against Dalits must begin with a meaningful understanding of the economics of exclusion. This paper sets out to describe the links between racial and economic discrimination against Dalits in India, and the violent and degrading mechanisms by which each is sustained and institutionalised. It argues that the government's longstanding failure to enforce its own protective legislation or implement strategies to narrow the socio-economic gap between Dalits and the rest of the population has only been exacerbated by India's economic reforms. The paper ends with possible strategies at the national and global level to break the cycle of economic dependency and physical vulnerability.

Caste and employment discrimination

Allocation of labour on the basis of caste is one of the fundamental tenets of the caste system. In traditional Indian society, Hinduism's fourfold *varna* theory describes a broad functional division of labour. For those within the four principal caste categories, caste has not proved to be a completely rigid system. Just as the higher ritual status of Brahmins does not necessarily translate into economic or political supremacy, those lower in the ranks are able to move up in the local hierarchy through the capture of political power, the acquisition of land, and migration to other regions.²

¹ Legal parlance for Dalits.

² A combination of these strategies and India's policy of quotas or reservations have particularly benefited the so-called backward castes, or Shudras. Referred to as 'other backward classes' (OBCs) in administrative parlance, backward castes are defined as those whose ritual rank and occupational status are above "untouchables" but who themselves remain socially and economically depressed.

For Dalits, however, who occupy the fifth and lowest caste category, caste remains a determinative factor for the attainment of social, political, civil, and economic rights. Migration and the anonymity of the urban environment have in some cases resulted in upward occupational mobility, but the majority continues to perform their traditional or 'polluting' functions. A lack of training and education, as well as discrimination in seeking other forms of employment, have kept these traditions and their hereditary nature alive. Many 'untouchable' community members, for example, continue to work as leather workers, disposers of dead animals, and manual scavengers. As part of village custom, Dalits are made to render free services in times of death, marriage, or any village function. The cleaning of the whole village, the digging of graves, the carrying of firewood, and the disposal of dead animals are also tasks that Dalits are made to perform. A majority of the Dalit rural workforce subsists on the menial wages of landless agricultural labourers, earning less than US\$1 a day. Those in urban areas, work mostly in the unorganised sector. India's much touted system of affirmative action or reservations for scheduled castes assists less than 1 percent of the Dalit population. In all forms of labour, women are consistently paid less than men, compounding the dual discrimination of caste and gender.

Manual scavenging

According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers (a majority of them women) who clear faeces from public and private latrines and dispose of dead animals; unofficial estimates are much higher. Manual scavenging is a caste-based occupation, deemed too polluting and filthy for anyone but Dalits. Manual scavengers exist under different caste names throughout the country, such as the Bhangis in Gujarat, the Pakhis in Andhra Pradesh, and the Sikkaliars in Tamil Nadu. Members of these communities are invariably placed at the very bottom of the caste hierarchy, and even the hierarchy of Dalit sub-castes. Using little more than a broom, a tin plate, and a basket, they are made to clear faeces from public and private latrines and carry them to dumping grounds and disposal sites. Though long outlawed, the practice of manual scavenging continues in most states.

An activist in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, who has been working for the rehabilitation of cleaning workers for the past sixteen years, describes the pay scale in his state:

Private cleaners receive Rs.5 to ten a month for each house they clean [US\$0.11 to \$0.21]³. They clean up to ten to fifteen houses a day, many of which have six or more family members. Those employed by urban municipalities are paid Rs.2,000 to Rs.2,500 [US\$43 - \$53] a month but are only paid once every four to six months. Some are permanent, and some are casual. There are no health benefits, no gloves, no masks, and no utensils. The majority is made up of women.

Social discrimination against scavengers is rampant. Most scavengers live in segregated rural colonies and are unable to make use of common resources. According to the activist:

³ The conversion rate used is US\$1 to Rs.46.76.

In one toilet there can be as many as four hundred seats which all have to be manually cleaned. This is the lowest occupation in the world, and it is done by the community that occupies the lowest status in the caste system. Even other scheduled-caste people won't touch the safai karamcharis [cleaning workers]. It is 'untouchability' within the 'untouchables,' yet nobody questions it.

Poverty among Bhangis is so acute, that some have even been known to separate non-digested wheat from buffalo dung to make chappatis (flat bread). When interviewed in early 1998, thirty-year-old Parsotambhai, a mother of three in Ahmedabad district, Gujarat, earned Rs.10 (US\$0.21) a month for each house she cleaned. She also received small amounts of food once a day and complained that there was too much work. Others voiced similar complaints:

They give one person too much work so they have to take their family members, even their children, at night to finish the work; otherwise, they would be fired. It takes four people to do the work that they give one person. None of the children are really studying. Girls sometimes study up to fifth standard, boys up to seventh.

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 prohibits the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry (non-flush) latrines with imprisonment for up to one year and/or a fine as high as Rs.2,000 (US\$43). Offenders are also liable for prosecution under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

In 1992, the government launched a national scheme that called for the identification, training, and rehabilitation of safai karamcharis (cleaning workers) throughout the country. Yet when confronted with the existence of manual scavenging and dry latrines within their jurisdiction, state governments often deny their existence altogether or claim that a lack of water supply prevents states from constructing flush latrines. This despite the fact that a sum of Rs.4,640,000,000 (US\$992.3 million) was allocated to the scheme under the government's Eighth Five-Year Plan. Activists claim that the resources, including government funds, exist for construction and for the rehabilitation of scavengers; what is lacking is the political will to do so.

Landless agricultural labourers

Most Dalit victims of abuse are landless agricultural labourers who form the backbone of India's agrarian economy. Despite a host of land reform legislation, today over eighty-six per cent of Dalit households are landless or near landless. Those who own land often fall into the category of marginal landowners. Land is the prime asset in rural areas that determines an individual's standard of living and social status.

Lack of access to land makes Dalits economically vulnerable; their dependency is exploited by upper- and middle-caste landlords and allows for many abuses to go unpunished. Landless agricultural labourers throughout the country work for a few kilograms of rice or Rs.15 to Rs.35 (US\$0.32 to \$0.75) a day, well below the minimum wage prescribed in their state. Many labourers owe debts to their employers or other moneylenders.

Land reform and increased wages for rural labourers are the central demands of most leftist guerrilla organisations active in West Bengal, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. Private landlord militias and state security forces have targeted civilians thought to be guerrilla sympathisers. The failure of most state governments to implement land reform legislation has only added to the sense of economic vulnerability that fuels militant movements. In Bihar in particular, guerrillas enjoy Dalit support, as most of the Dalit community lives on the edge of starvation. Laws and regulations that prohibit alienation of Dalit lands, set ceilings on a single landowner's holdings, or allocate surplus government lands to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been largely ignored, or worse, manipulated by upper castes with the help of district administrations.

In 1996, a door-to-door survey of two hundred and fifty villages in the state of Gujarat found that in almost all villages those who had title to land had no possession, and those who had possession had not had their land measured or faced illegal encroachments from upper castes. Many had no record of their holdings at all. Even those who had been offered land under agrarian reform legislation refused to accept it for fear of an upper-caste backlash. Efforts by Dalits to acquire land through the land reforms are met with social boycotts ostracising them from buying or selling anything in the village. These boycotts and other retaliatory acts are described further below.

Bonded labour

Given the insignificant amounts of remuneration in manual scavenging, agricultural labour, and other fields of Dalit employment, it comes as little surprise that many families borrow money from their upper-caste neighbours and consequently go into bondage.

An estimated forty million people in India, among them fifteen million children, are bonded labourers working in slave-like conditions in order to pay off a debt. Bonded labour refers to work in slave-like conditions in order to pay off a debt. Due to the high interest rates charged and the abysmally low wages paid, the debts are seldom settled. Bonded labourers are frequently low-caste, illiterate, and extremely poor, while the creditors/employers are usually higher-caste, literate, comparatively wealthy, and relatively more powerful members of the community.

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 abolishes all agreements and obligations arising out of the bonded labour system. It aims to release all labourers from bondage, cancel any outstanding debt, prohibit the creation of new bondage agreements, and order the economic rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers by the state. It also punishes attempts to compel persons into bondage with a maximum of three years in prison and a Rs.2,000 (US\$43) fine. However, the extent to which bonded labourers have been identified, released, and rehabilitated in the country is negligible. A lack of political will, and outright abuse of the law has also sabotaged any meaningful implementation of protective criminal legislation, affirmative action quotas, or the constitutional promise of universal primary education.

Education and reservations

The Indian Constitution mandates the state to provide free, compulsory and universal education for all children up to fourteen years, with special care and consideration given to promote the educational progress of scheduled castes. India's policy of reservations is an attempt by the central government to remedy past injustices related to low-caste status. To allow for proportional representation in certain state and federal institutions, the constitution reserves 22.5 per cent of seats in federal government jobs, state legislatures, the lower house of parliament, and educational institutions for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Fifty years on, illiteracy still plagues almost two thirds of Dalits as compared to about one half of the general population. The literacy gap between Dalits and the rest of the population fell a scant .39 percent between 1961 and 1991. Ninety-nine per cent of Dalit students are enrolled in government schools that lack basic infrastructure, classrooms, teachers and teaching aids. A majority is also enrolled in vernacular schools whose students suffer serious disadvantages in the job market as compared to those who learn in English-speaking schools.

Despite state assistance in primary education, Dalits also face an alarming dropout rate. According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' 1996-97 and 1997-98 Report, the national dropout rate for Dalit children was a staggering 49.35 per cent at the primary level, 67.77 per cent for middle school, and 77.65 per cent for secondary school. Though these rates are partly attributable to the need for Dalit children to supplement their family wages through labour, more insidious and less well-documented are the loss of faith in education as an instrument for socio-economic change, and the discriminatory and abusive treatment faced by Dalit children, who often sit in the back of classrooms, at the hands of their teachers and fellow students.⁴

The reservation policy, too, has not been fully implemented. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' report also indicates that of the total scheduled caste reservation quota in the Central Government, fifty-four per cent remains unfilled. More than eighty-eight per cent remains unfilled in the public sector and forty-five per cent in state banks. A closer examination of the caste composition of government services, institutions of education and other services, however, reveals an "unacknowledged reservation policy" for upper-castes, particularly Brahmins, insidiously built into the system. Though they represented only five per cent of the population in 1989, Brahmins comprised

⁴ In a school in Dhandhuka town, Gujarat, for example, a thirteen-year-old Dalit boy was singled out among several students playing with his Brahmin teacher's scooter. The teacher told the boy's father, a manual scavenger, that he was going to expel the child from school. After much pleading on the father's part, the teacher allowed the boy to stay in school on the condition that the father sign an apology letter. As the boy re-entered the classroom, the teacher threatened the child saying he would not allow him to study or amount to anything in life. Later that evening the boy was found dead on the railroad track, his body cut into three pieces by an oncoming train. In his pocket was found the following suicide note: "*I would not have felt bad if the teacher had abused me. I would not have felt bad if the teacher had slapped me. But because he humiliated my father, I felt very bad and finally when he told me he wouldn't let me study or progress in life, I felt extremely hurt. If I am not going to be able to study and progress in life what is the meaning of living my life?*"

seventy per cent of the Class I officers in governmental services. At universities, upper-castes occupy ninety per cent of the teaching posts in the social sciences and ninety-four per cent in the sciences, while Dalit representation is a lowly 1.2 and 0.5 percent, respectively.

Physical and economic retaliation

A principal weapon in sustaining economic and racial discrimination against Dalits is the use of social and economic boycotts and acts of retaliatory violence. Dalits are physically abused and threatened with economic and social ostracism from the community for refusing to carry out various caste-based tasks. Any attempt to alter village customs, defy the social order, or to demand land, increased wages, or political rights leads to violence and economic retaliation on the part of those most threatened by changes in the status quo. Dalit communities as a whole are summarily punished for individual transgressions; Dalits are cut off from community land and employment during social boycotts, women bear the brunt of physical attacks, and the letter of the law is rarely enforced.

Large-scale clashes between caste communities in Tamil Nadu's southern districts in recent years, for example, have often been triggered by Dalits' efforts to draw water from a "forbidden" well or by their refusal to perform a delegated task. Describing a boycott in 1998, a village resident and social worker in the Marathwada region of the state of Maharashtra recalled:

The upper caste got together and said that we touched their God so we shouldn't live here. They put a social boycott on all the Dalits. We could not enter their land, we could not work for them, we could not get wood, we could not buy goods from their stores, and we could not grind grain in the flourmill. We were not even allowed to go near the wells in upper-caste territory to fetch water.

The boycott is reinforced when the village council levies fines against caste Hindus who refuse to participate in it. In villages in Karnataka state, for example, upper castes have been known to fine Rs.501 (US\$10.71) for giving employment to Dalits during a social boycott.

Despite their appalling work conditions, even manual scavengers are unable to demand higher wages or sanitary instruments for use in the collection of human excreta. According to one: "*When we ask for our rights from the government, the municipality officials threaten to fire us. So we don't say anything. This is what happens to people who demand their rights.*"

Since the early 1990s, violence against Dalits has escalated dramatically in response to growing Dalit rights movements. Between 1995 and 1997, a total of 90,925 cases were registered with the police nation-wide as crimes and atrocities against scheduled castes. Of these 1,617 were for murder, 12,591 for hurt, 2,824 for rape, and 31,376 for offences listed under the Prevention of Atrocities Act. Given that Dalits are both reluctant and unable (for lack of police co-operation) to report crimes against themselves, the actual number of abuses is presumably much higher.

India's National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has reported that these cases typically fall into one of three categories: cases relating to the practice of

'untouchability' and attempts to defy the social order; cases relating to land disputes and demands for minimum wages; and cases of atrocities by police and forest officials. Most of the conflicts take place within very narrow segments of the caste hierarchy, between the poor and the not so poor, the landless labourer and the marginal landowner. The differences lie in the considerable amount of leverage that the higher-caste Hindus or non-Dalits are able to wield over local police, district administrations, and even the state government.

The state's failure to prosecute atrocities against Dalits is well illustrated by its manipulation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Enacted in 1989, the Act provides for stiffer punishments for abuses against members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Its enactment represented an acknowledgement on the part of the government that abuses, in their most degrading and violent forms, were still perpetrated against Dalits decades after independence.

The potential of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, to bring about social change, however, has been hampered by police corruption and caste bias, with the result that many allegations are not entered in police books. Ignorance of procedures and a lack of knowledge of the act have also affected its implementation. Even when cases are registered, the absence of special courts to try them can delay prosecutions for up to three to four years. Some state governments dominated by higher castes have even attempted to repeal the legislation altogether.

The impact of economic reforms

The impact of India's aggressive shift from a state regulated economy to a market economy with the privatisation of industries and the liquidation of policies and controls in economic planning and regulation has been most acutely felt by Dalits. The now decade-old economic reforms cling faithfully to the flawed 'trickle down' theory – a theory that holds even less relevance for Dalits for whom few benefits can permeate the caste ceiling.

Since 1991, the start of India's New Economic Policy, the country has made astounding progress in the areas of technology, infrastructure, machinery, science, space and even nuclear research. Much of this progress has meant little to Dalits; most continue to live without the very basic amenities of electricity, sanitation, and safe drinking water.

According to the Madras Institute for Development Studies, only thirty-one per cent of Dalit households are equipped with electricity, as compared to sixty-one per cent on non-Dalit households. Only ten per cent of Dalit households have sanitation facilities as compared to twenty-seven per cent of non-Dalit ones. Disparities in distribution are not accidental. 'Untouchability' is reinforced by state allocation of facilities; separate facilities are provided for separate colonies. Dalits often receive the poorer of the two, if they receive any at all. In many villages, the state administration installs electricity, sanitation facilities, and water pumps in the upper-caste section, but neglects to do the same in the neighbouring, segregated Dalit colony. Basic supplies such as water are also segregated, and medical facilities and the better, thatched-roof houses exist exclusively in the upper-caste colony.

Available statistics reveal that between 1987 and 1993, the percentage of Dalits living below the poverty line actually increased by five percent, reversing a declining trend of the previous fifteen years. Half of the Dalit population lived below the poverty line in 1993 compared to a third of the general population. The poverty gap has continued to widen since 1993, as have the trends toward economic “liberalisation” and the state’s failure to equitably allocate and distribute resources.

As liberalisation leads to a capital-intensive mode of production requiring a greater proportion of highly skilled workers to manage automated production processes, a large migration of unskilled labour to the agricultural sector has led to lower wages for agricultural workers as a whole. Eighty-five percent of India’s Dalit population lives in rural areas and is directly associated with agriculture and cultivation. In addition to a reduction in agricultural subsidies, Dalits are also affected by the increased acquisition of coastal lands by multinationals (via the central government) for aquaculture projects. Dalits are the main labourers and tenants of coastal land areas and are increasingly being forced to leave these areas – to live as displaced people, for the most part – as foreign investment rises.

A reduction in the budget and fiscal deficit, devaluation, privatisation, the elimination or reduction in subsidies, and export promotion have also all contributed to inflation. As is true the world over, inflation hits the poorest the hardest. With most of their earnings spent on food, shelter, and clothing, any rise in prices has had a direct negative effect on Dalits’ level of consumption. A lack of purchasing power is compounded by the devaluation of currency. The devaluation, aimed at increasing exports and creating more markets for domestic industries, has also led to a rise in prices for general essential imports.

With the underlying economic philosophy of increased reliance on market forces, a dismantling of controls, and a drastically reduced role of the state, the public sector is shrinking. The reservations model is therefore affecting – and able to assist – fewer people, inasmuch as government-related jobs are being drastically reduced. Reservations in educational institutions and scholarships for Dalit students represent a critical component in Dalit socio-economic development. Economic reforms have also led to a freezing in grants to many institutions. The privatisation of social services is also turning education and health services into commodities only affordable to the rich.

National and international strategies to combat discrimination

The exploitation of agricultural labourers and the rigid assignment of demeaning occupations on the basis of caste keep Dalits in a position of economic and physical vulnerability. The triple burden of caste, class, and gender effectively ensures that Dalit women are the furthest removed from legal protections. Only with the honest implementation of laws designed to protect agricultural labourers and abolish manual scavenging and bonded labour, and the systematic prosecution of those responsible for attacks on Dalit men and women, can the process of attaining economic and physical security begin.

Dalits’ status as an excluded caste of landless labourers has also made them particularly vulnerable to the global economic forces unleashed by India’s economic reforms. As articulated by Dr. Anand Teltumbde in his paper on the impact of economic reforms on

Dalits in India, to be meaningful to the majority of India's poor, any reform strategy must embody

sustainable economic empowerment of rural masses; investments to enhance their capability and effective measures for accelerated development of the disadvantaged sections like Dalits. The pre-requisite to reforms therefore could be the radical land reforms, massive investments in rural areas into agriculture-related infrastructural projects, universalisation of primary education, primary health care system and reinforcement of positive discrimination in favour of Dalits.⁵

New steps are also required at the national and international level to give effect to international standards on racism in the areas of criminal justice and public administration. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination requires remedial action whenever there is a racist effect from public policy, but many states interpret their obligations to combat racism as limited to addressing racist intent. In the absence of implementation data and constant monitoring, the racist effect of public policy in many countries can be expected to continue to comprehensively to block the enjoyment of social, economic, and cultural rights, through the denial of education, social services, and protection from economic exploitation.

In India's case, the government must make available to the public government studies on issues affecting Dalits. Specifically, the government should release the white paper on reservations and the white paper on land reform. The first outlines the extent to which constitutional reservations have been implemented at the state and central level since independence. In particular, attention should be given to implementation of reservations in all ministries, in the secretariats of the Prime Minister and President, and in the police and judiciary. The second outlines the extent to which tenancy acts and acts that establish ceilings on single landowners' holdings have been implemented in all states.

In upholding constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom, justice and human dignity, it must then commit to: land and wage reform and the realisation of primary education for all children; implement measures designed to ensure that states abolish the practice of 'untouchability,' in compliance with Article 17 of the Constitution; prevent further violence and prosecute both state and private actors responsible for caste-motivated attacks on Dalit communities; enforce the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and other relevant legislation; and educate state agents and the Indian population on the rights and constitutional freedoms of all citizens.

The government must also fill all vacant scheduled-caste reservation posts with Dalit candidates, and as recommended by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, provide for reservations in the judiciary as well as the private sector, which continues to enjoy government patronage in terms of concessional land, financing, and excise and sales tax relief.

⁵ Anand Teltumbde, "Impact of Economic Reforms on Dalits in India," paper presented at the Seminar on 'Economic Reforms and Dalits in India' organised by the University of Oxford, Oxford, UK, on November 8, 1996, www.foil.org/inspiration/ambekar/ecoreforms.html.

At the global level, a first and essential step is the recognition that caste-based discrimination bars hundreds of millions from the exercise of their civil and political, and their economic, social, and cultural rights – a precondition for international programs to support the abolition of caste discrimination and to remedy abuses.

The World Bank and other international lending institutions operational in India should ensure that anti-discrimination measures are built into World Bank and Asian Development Bank-funded projects in areas where the problems of caste violence and caste discrimination are severe. As part of its commitment to good governance, the World Bank, as well as other international lending institutions, should establish ongoing dialogue with Dalit NGOs at all stages of the decision-making process— before a loan is released, while the project is being implemented, and in the course of any post-project evaluation. Of paramount importance is for the World Bank to ensure that its funds are not being routed by the government for the illegal employment of manual scavengers in their sanitation programs. Lending geared toward the promotion of privatisation must first evaluate and then counter the damage to social services resulting from an erosion of the public sector.

India's donors and trading partners must encourage India to implement its own laws and must use every opportunity to raise the problem of caste violence both publicly – at international meetings, congressional or parliamentary hearings, and in press conferences – and privately, at Consultative Group meetings and in meetings with relevant officials. They must also work to develop programs and strategies for bilateral and multilateral aid programs to India that would make funds available to promote legal literacy and economic rehabilitation programs.

United Nations agencies active in India must also pay particular attention to the issue of caste violence and caste discrimination and develop programs and strategies designed to curb abuse and encourage accountability.

Conclusion

The persistence of caste-based prejudices and the denial of access to land, education, and political power have all contributed to an atmosphere of increasing intolerance and growing movements by Dalits to claim their rights. These claims are increasingly met with large-scale violence and attempts to further remove Dalits from economic self-sufficiency. Any attempt to reverse entrenched discrimination and dangerous new trends necessitates a closer look at the rights violations hidden under a landscape of poverty.

Poverty is deceptive. It makes one conclude that all suffer from it equally. Poverty also masks a lack of political will to change the status quo by shifting the debate to a lack of resources. But a closer look at India's poverty reveals the discrimination inherent in the allocation of jobs, land, basic resources and amenities, and even physical security. A closer look at victims of violence, bonded labour, and other atrocities also reveals that they share in common the lowest ranking in the caste order. A perpetual state of economic dependency allows for atrocities to go unpunished, while a corrupt and racist state machinery looks the other way, or worse, becomes complicit in the abuse. Nationally, the government must act to uphold its own constitutional principles and work toward the uplifting of all citizens,

regardless of caste. Globally, the international community must acknowledge its own role in sustaining economic and racial discrimination and then play its part to dismantle India's 'hidden apartheid.'