

Dalit Women's Political Participation in Nepal

Thank you Madam Chair for giving me the opportunity to speak.

Namaste and Good Morning. My name is Renu Sijapati representing the Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal.

I feel honour to be here to share the political situation of Dalit women in Nepal. I thank you for inviting and giving me this opportunity. I believe such opportunity empowers us and our issues to be internationalized. Before I go through the presentation, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all international agencies who have actively been involved in promotion and protection of the rights of Dalits in Nepal. With this let me share the overall condition, issues/challenges and way forward for the upliftment of Dalit women in Nepal.

According to the government census, Dalit are 13% of the whole population. Dalit academics including Dalit civil society organisations have different claim. They claim the Dalit are more than 20% of whole population. So far as the Dalit women's population is concerned, they constitute; 20% of the total Nepalese women.

Nepali society is caste ridden and status oriented. Women in Nepal have been discriminated on the basis of gender for centuries. Dalit women are still treated as second and low class human beings. They are discriminated against not only by so called higher castes people, but also within their own communities where men are dominant. They are therefore triple oppressed by society, by family and by state. Such discrimination has lead women to their secondary status in the society and disadvantaged of equal participation in all government process. Only a small group of women from the elite have power, The Dalit women are nowhere in the race or are far behind.

Nepal is in the post conflict situation. After a decade long armed conflict, the Comprehensive Peace agreement formally ended the conflict in Nepal. The peace making process is underway to resolve the issues of social exclusion. The interim constitution and the peace agreement have stated for the participation of Dalit including other minorities in Nepal. Out of a total of 601 members of Constituent Assembly there are 50 Dalit members, 25 of those are Dalit women. However the representation of Dalit women in policy making level of political parties is weak. There is only one Dalit woman member of the Central Committee of UCPN Maoist and there are two Dalit women in the central committee of Nepali Congress Party.

Apart from the Consultant Assembly there is almost nil representation of Dalit women in other governance organs. The human development reports states: Nepali women are almost invisible in the civil society making up only 8% of overall staff and 4% of officers. There is hardly any representation of Dalit women in public services. Needless to say that Dalit women in Nepal face multiple forms of discrimination and continues to ensure discrimination in many areas including education, health, employment and access to economic resources.

Until and unless Dalit women are not considered as the citizens, there will be no change in the condition of Dalit women. It is therefore essential that there should be increased political participation of Dalit women. And they should also have decision-making positions. They should have the opportunity in the political position.

Dear Madam, I would like to mention some of the recommendation for initiatives for the Government of Nepal:

- The government should adopt a new constitution which ensures Dalit women's proportional representation in every political body (ie political parties and associated political organs).
- The government should ensure meaningful representation of Dalit women in public policies, plans, project formation and monitoring and evaluation.
- The government should adopt constitutional provisions for the proportional representation of Dalit women in all areas of economic , political, administrative, educational, social and cultural life. These provisions should have a strong oversight mechanism for monitoring their implementation.
- The government should pay particular attention to combating violence against Dalit women and girls and to adopt comprehensive measures to address such violence, including undertaking wider awareness raising program sin Dalit communities, specifically targeting men and boys.
- With this I stop my presentation.