

16th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues

30th November to 1st December

Item 1: Challenges to inclusion and equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups

30th November

Lené Strydom

Thank you Madame Chair

In the vast landscape of India, the journey towards inclusion and equality encounters significant hurdles, particularly when it comes to the empowerment of Dalit women. Despite the existence of legal frameworks and social progress, persistent barriers obstruct the social and economic integration of this marginalised demographic. The intricate interplay of caste and gender discrimination weaves a complex tapestry of challenges, necessitating targeted interventions to usher in substantial and meaningful change.

At the heart of the matter is the systemic discrimination entrenched in India's deeply rooted caste hierarchy, casting a shadow over the lives of Dalit women. This discrimination manifests across various spheres, from educational pursuits to employment, perpetuating a continuous cycle of exclusion.

One critical hurdle faced by Dalit women is in the realm of education. Discrimination and bias contribute to lower enrollment rates among Dalit girls, curbing their educational achievements. The absence of proper education, in turn, limits economic opportunities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Furthermore, discriminatory practices within educational institutions create an unwelcoming environment, impeding the personal and professional growth of Dalit women.

Economically, Dalit women often find themselves marginalised, confined to low-wage, informal sector jobs. Discrimination in the formal job market restricts their access to better opportunities, hindering their economic empowerment. The lack of representation in decision-making roles further amplifies the economic disparities faced by Dalit women.

In light of these challenges, Association Maonah and Geneva International Centre for Justice call upon states to address these pressing issues. Focus should be directed towards enhancing access to quality education, dismantling discriminatory practices within institutions, and promoting economic opportunities for Dalit women in schooling, work and society. Raising awareness and challenging ingrained stereotypes are imperative steps towards fostering a more inclusive society.

Thank you.