

Dalit Global Conference in US Advocates End to Caste-based Discrimination Affecting Estimated 280 Million Individuals Worldwide

Advocates for Dalit rights are expanding their movement to establish justice, dignity, and equality with an [historic global conference](#) occurring in Washington, D.C., March 19-21. Several notable activists and thought leaders in the realm of human rights, including Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton and Dr. Cornel West, are declaring solidarity with Dalits, and helping bring greater attention to their plight by participating with the conference and [call-to-action event](#) planned for Saturday, March 21 at 12noon in front of the White House.

Washington, D.C. ([PRWEB](#)) March 04, 2015 -- The International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR) and the Global Conference Organizing Committee (GCOC) are pleased to announce the [1st Global Conference on Defending Dalit Rights](#) (#DalitGlobalConference), taking place on the campus of Trinity Washington University (125 Michigan Avenue, NE) in Washington, D.C., from March 19-21, 2015. This three-day conference is convening dozens of Dalit advocates and allies, as well as sympathizers, from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Europe, Canada, and across the United States, to increase awareness and develop a strategic framework designed to mitigate and bring an end to the grievous issue of Caste-based discrimination (CBD), affecting an estimated 280 million individuals today.

The term Dalit (meaning “oppressed”) is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as ‘untouchable’ in the Indian caste system (also known as “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes”), now extending throughout South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and the diaspora. The Dalit plight is a contemporary humanitarian crisis, often referred to as a ‘hidden apartheid’, with victims forced into slave and bonded labor, denied access to communal water sources, and refused service at public establishments solely on the basis of their caste or descent. Such discrimination is especially harsh for women and children born within low-caste communities, resulting in rape and murder, with countless numbers forced into sex trafficking.

Conference attendees will advocate the passing of a [binding resolution by the U.S. Congress officially condemning Caste-based discrimination](#), and lobby member nations of the United Nations (UN) to endorse the UN “[Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent](#)”, established by the UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/11/CRP.3). One of the thematic sessions of the conference will serve to identify opportunities to strengthen the power of Dalit women by linking organizations dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment with those dedicated to fighting caste, work, and descent-based discrimination. Of note, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) will be in attendance throughout part of the conference, as will other participants from notable NGOs and policy bodies including the UN, Human Rights Watch, and The World Bank.

On Saturday, March 21, 2015, the Global Conference will culminate in a “[Human Chain](#)” demonstration, being staged in front of the White House (on Pennsylvania Avenue) in Washington, D.C. This demonstration is a public ‘call-to-action’ and invitation for social justice and human rights groups, concerned citizens, and people of goodwill to show their support and stand in solidarity with Dalit people worldwide. March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN-recognized), and will also be proclaimed “Dalit Solidarity and Dignity Day” in the nation’s capital. Beginning with a press conference at 12noon, the GCOC will announce their strategic framework and the D.C. Declaration of Dalit Rights, followed by a rally at

1:30pm that will include various speakers, including prominent scholar and social activist Dr. Cornel West, among others.

During the Global Conference, the ICDR will present three new key initiatives: 1) the Caste Freedom Index (CFI), an unique universal measurement and advocacy framework that increases the capacity of caste-affected countries to eliminate caste or work and descent-based discrimination; 2) the Dalit Civil Society Network (DCSN), an online resource designed to facilitate communication and connections between Dalit advocates and allies worldwide; and, 3) the Student FRDM (Friends of the Dalit Movement) Initiative, an effort designed to engage and leverage students' and faculty members' participation at colleges and universities in the West in the growing efforts to bring the Dalit cause to the center stage of the world's awareness for the purpose of effectively dismantling the attitudes and institutions that still allow the practice of 'untouchability' to go virtually unchecked in the contemporary world.

[Registration](#) for the conference is still open, with a range of admission prices including General Admission (\$100.00 for March 19 & 20), Student (\$50.00 for March 19 & 20), One Day General Admission (\$50.00 for March 19 OR 20), and One Day Student (\$25.00 for March 19 OR 20). To register for the Global Conference please visit <http://bit.ly/1yfldad>. The "Human Chain" demonstration on March 21 is free and open to the general public.

The Global Conference is the vision of the [ICDR](#), a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) non-profit international advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the equality, justice, and rights of the world's most marginalized groups by providing technical assistance, networking, and collaborating with local civil society, NGOs, and government agencies in caste-affected countries. For more information on the ICDR and the GCOC, please visit <http://www.ICDRINTL.org>. To make a donation in support of the conference and demonstration, please visit <http://www.gofundme.com/DalitGlobalConfere>.

The media is invited and encouraged to cover this important and historic event. Please contact Mikuak Rai, Global Conference Manager and Media Coordinator, for more information at (202) 276-3099 and by emailing [gc.manager\(AT\)icdrintl.org](mailto:gc.manager(AT)icdrintl.org).

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