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India slams European Parliament resolution on Dalits

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A resolution adopted by the European Parliament (EP) on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India has come under strong fire from several sides.

'It is unfortunate that the EP could come out with such a resolution which lacks balance and perspective,' Amar Sinha, an Indian embassy spokesman in Brussels, told INEP news agency.

'It indicates a highly negative mindset on the part of the people who have drafted it,' he said, adding that the 'report focuses only the negative aspects and has selectively used statistics to prove its hypothesis.'

In a strong-worded resolution put forward by the Development Committee, the EP resolution said that implementation of laws protecting the rights of Dalits remains 'grossly inadequate, and that atrocities, untouchability, illiteracy, inequality of opportunity, continue to blight the lives of India's Dalits.'

The EP resolution noted with concern 'the lack of substantive European Union (EU) engagement with the Indian government, notably within the EU-India summits, on the vast problem of caste-based discrimination.'

British MEP Neena Gill condemned the report saying, it 'is riddled with inaccuracies and does a clear



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disservice to the Human Rights cause! The value of this report is seriously drawn into question by the whole lack of scrutiny applied to it.'

Gill, chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) delegation in the EP, noted that of the 785 members of the EP (MEP), less than 30 took part in the vote.

'This is a highly sensitive report on a very important issue and the way it has been rushed through Parliament without consultation of either the SAARC delegation, the Sub-Committee on Human Rights, nor the Foreign Affairs Committee, is outrageous!' said Gill.

Sunil Prasad, secretary general of the Europe India Chamber of Commerce (EICC) and President of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), Belgium, also condemned the resolution.

'The EP's resolution on the protection of Dalits is somewhat ideologically misplaced and strategically misguided. It is not fair on its part to rush and pass a resolution before verifying the facts and the current situation,' Prasad told INEP.

The EP resolution urged the EU Council and the European Commission to raise the issue of 'caste-based discrimination during EU-India summits and other meetings as part of all political, human rights, civil society, development and trade dialogues and to inform the committees concerned of the progress and outcome of such dialogues.'

The House nevertheless welcomed the various provisions in the Constitution of India for the protection and promotion of the rights of Dalits.

The resolution followed a hearing in the EP's Development Committee Dec 18 on the human rights situation of the Dalits with Ruth Manorama, president

of the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) and Paul Divakar, national convenor of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights in India.

Both alleged that human rights of the 165 million Dalits were being violated in India.

The meeting was chaired by Margrete Auken, a Danish MEP for the Greens. She is also the rapporteur of the EP report.

'In the context of expanding trade relations with India, the EU must put pressure on the Indian government and demand basic human rights for all Indian citizens,' Auken said in a separate statement.

'Caste discrimination in India is one of the best kept secrets in terms of human rights violations and to date the EU has failed to address this serious issue openly,' she said.

Explaining why no representative of the Indian government was present during the hearing, Sinha said a draft report had already been prepared and was in circulation even before the first hearing on the subject took place.

The EP resolution also calls on the government to 'ratify the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and to take preventive measures to reduce the risk of Dalits facing torture.'

Prasad said: 'I do not think Dalits are being subjected to any type of human right violations or discrimination in India. The government has taken many policy initiatives and economic measures to see that Dalits have the same rights as all Indians.'

'The Indian constitution outlaws caste and caste bias cannot be equated with racial discrimination. Parliament should know that altering of an age-old

tradition takes time and India has taken numerous laws and schemes as a measure of its commitment to protect Dalits,' added Prasad.



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