

Respected Chair, delegates, excellencies & Civil Society,

My name is Bhakta Bishwakarma, representing the Dalit Constituency within the Asia Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Asia Dalit Rights Forum. Dalits and communities discriminated by work and descent are among the most marginalized and excluded in terms of political, social, and economic development. While the general consensus is that the pandemic has impacted all equally, research shows that it has a more far-reaching impact on the most marginalized communities like Dalits and people discriminated by work and descent, women, indigenous and minorities. Across generations, these communities have faced discrimination and exclusion in every sphere of life, and this has often led to a high incidence of poverty among them and precludes them from the enjoyment of their basic rights and entitlements as well as meaningful participation in public life. The multi-dimensional impact of COVID-19 range from poverty, hunger, unemployment, denial and limitations to access healthcare services, increased incidents of violence and stigmatization, and much more. As countries are rebuilding, the motto of 'Leave No One Behind' must be looked at in all earnest. If not, the implications for the discriminated, in terms of their social-political-economic position, will be grim. The pandemic has affected access to education, livelihood, and access to health in the global south specifically Asia. If we were to achieve the SDGs by 2030 there has to be more done on ensuring that the marginalized communities' issues are fore grounded in the mechanisms put in place to address the impact of covid. During the pandemic, women from these communities were doubly impacted, where violence on Dalits and similarly discriminated continued despite the covid.

We call on the states to have an:

1. Inclusive, universal coverage of all marginalized communities like Dalits, communities discriminated by work and descent under existing national security schemes, particularly those for livelihood and income support, preventive and curative healthcare, and food and nutrition security, on an urgent and priority basis.
2. Economic packages (cash and in-kind assistance) oriented towards these communities which allow for flexibility in access to these packages (in terms of documentation

required, ability to access the packages etc.) must be rolled out

3. States must create a database or disaggregated data of individuals to enhance identification of those who have not secured relief entitlements and to ensure that efforts can be made in the future for more pointed relief for the most marginalized within the Dalit communities, such as Dalit women, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Subsequently, ensure that those left behind are prioritized.