

**Statement at the Forum for Minority UN
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Swati Kamble,

Dalit women and effective participation in economic life

Madam Chairperson,

I thank you for giving me the floor. The Forum on Minority issues is an excellent avenue to discuss all issues pertaining to the minorities. The Forum, in its last two sessions, has deliberated on important themes. The theme for this session, 'Minorities and effective participation in economic life' is of fundamental importance, to advance critical discussion on the measures to achieve fair, equal and effective participation of disadvantaged minorities. This theme also corresponds with the on-going effects of the recent global economic and financial crisis that has severely hit all the vulnerable segments of the society. I will speak about Dalit women in particular.

Dalit (the former untouchables) constitute around 5 percent of the world's population and are the most discriminated minorities. India on the one hand has globally "emerged" as said President Obama and on the other hand the Dalit despite of being skilled laborers face tremendous poverty and insecurity in economic life. Dalit suffer severe forms of humiliation, stigmatization and exclusion even today in urban and rural spaces alike. Dalit women, Dalit within Dalit, are triply marginalized as Dalit, as women and as Poor.

Dalit women number 80 million or approximately 48 percent of the total Dalit population, 16 percent of the total female population and 8 percent of the total Indian population. They make majority of unorganized laborer in urban India and landless laborers in rural. Most of the work Dalit women do go unpaid or underpaid as they serve the informal service sector without social security.

Dalit women face insecurity and sexual harassment at workplace due to the nature of the work as domestic workers, rag pickers, manual scavengers and landless laborer. Forced prostitution through religious sanctity known as Devdasi system is the most repelling exemplary of Dalit women's sexual and economic oppression which continues even today. Such Systemic violence is embedded in the structure of the dominant society, which does not acknowledge the basic human rights Dalit women.

The Intersectionality of Caste, Class and Patriarchy need to be critically understood in ensuring economic rights of Dalit women. The founding father of constitution of India and the champion of Dalit and Minority Rights, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved". On this note, I would like to urge the Forum on Minority to critically look into the socio-economic progress of Dalit women while measuring the progress of India. And I would like to ask the International community, represented by the United Nations (UN), the Human rights council and the Indian state to collectively intervene and prioritize the economic development of Dalit women by effectively implementing inclusive policies.