

Child labour and the position of Dalits in India

Kv-tk-2011Z21475

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Answers to Questions of the member VoordeWind (Christian Union) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation on child labour and the position of Dalits in India (submitted 31 October 2011)

1. Are you aware of reports that the negotiations about the EU-India free trade agreement are in an advanced stage and will possibly be finalized in February?ⁱ

Answer

Yes. The parties hope to finalize the negotiations in 2012. As is being mentioned in the report to the Parliament of the RBZ [=Council Foreign Affairs] trade politics of 26 September 2011 (TK 25074 nr. 174) both parties have said to aim at a breakthrough in the negotiations that can be formalized during the next EU-India Summit planned to held before February 2012.

2. Do you know that the European Council in a document of 23 September 2011ⁱⁱ speaks about binding provisions on a range of issues regarding trade and investments with regard to the EU-India free trade agreement, while related issues concerning sustainable development are only discussed in terms of ‘co-operation’?

Answer

Yes.

3. In which way are you working on the implementation of the motion VoordeWindⁱⁱⁱ in which the government is requested “to exert its efforts in the European context for a robust sustainability chapter, in which among other things is being aimed at: the reduction of child labour, the improvement of the position of Dalits, the availability of medicines for HIV/AIDS and a dispute settlement mechanism; and not to be agree with strongly weakened compromise.” Which results have you achieved thus far and how do you judge the chances of success?

Answer

Within the European Union The Netherlands has regularly expressed its concern about the progress of the negotiations and has several times urged

the European Commission for the inclusion of adequate arrangements on sustainability in the agreement, most recently during the Council for Foreign Affairs about trade politics of 26 September 2011. Commissioner De Gucht then said that, despite Indian objections, it will expectedly be possible to include such a chapter. For a complete report I am referring to the relevant letter to Parliament (TK 25 074, nr. 174).

4. Do you know the report of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) about India which shows that fundamental labour rights in India, in particular those of Dalits, are violated on a large scale?^{iv}

Answer

Yes.

5. On which evidence are the statements of the Minister [of Foreign Affairs] based that he has “full confidence in the way the Indian government is actively engaged in tackling these kind of issues (child labour, forced labour, non-discrimination etc.)” on the basis of “laws that they have recently adopted as well as their implementation.”^v How do these statements relate to the recent ITUC report and other reports about the violation of fundamental labour rights in India? Do these reports give reason to the Minister to revise his position? If so, how is he going to communicate this to the Indian government?

Answer

India has in recent years introduced legislation to tackle child labour, forced labour and non-discrimination.

Though the report of ITUC is critical about the position of Dalits, there are also studies/analyses that argue that the position of Dalits is improving, for example in Uttar Pradesh.

6. Did the Minister during his visit to India in the beginning of July also raise the question of the discrimination of Dalits about which in the motion Voordewind is being said that “250 million Dalits are the victim of a range of violations of fundamental human rights and that this group disproportionately suffers from violations of labour rights in the supply chains of Dutch companies, including in garments, seeds and natural stone?”^{vi}

Answer

I have raised the Dalit issue.

7. In which way are you working to implement the motion Voordewind on the position of Dalits? Are the results of this already visible? If so, which results? If not, why not?^{vii}

Answer

The human rights strategy of Dutch government states that effectiveness of policy is paramount and that in addition, interventions will be more selective. Following your motion I have decided to give an extra financial contribution to IDSN (International Dalit Solidarity Network) that is internationally working for the position of Dalits.

8. Does the Deputy Minister [of Economic affairs] during his planned visit to India in November this year intend to raise the issue of discrimination of Dalits? If so, what will in this context be his input regarding his promise to Parliament to raise the exploitation of Dalit girls in the South Indian garment industry with Indian government?^{viii} If not, why not?

Answer

During my economic visit to India of November 7-9 I discussed the Sumangali system, that especially affects Dalit girls, with my colleague Minister of State Singh of Corporate Affairs and informed him that The Netherlands is willing with the India government to (further) eradicate this system. He answered that he was pleased to accept this offer.

ⁱ <http://www.euasianews.com/>

ⁱⁱ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/EN/foraff/124715.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Parliament Document, 32 500- V-110 [see in Eng.: <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/m101215e.pdf>]

^{iv} <http://www.ituc-csi.org/india-workers-rights-require-more.html>

^v http://goedemorgennederland.kro.nl/seizoenen/2011-07/afleveringen/06-07-2011/fragmenten/minister_rosenthal_over_mensenrechten_in_india/

^{vi} 32 735 nr. 8 [see: <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/pb110701e.pdf>]

^{vii} Idem [see: <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/pb110701e.pdf>]

^{viii} <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/vr110524.pdf>