

Subject: On behalf of Amnesty International USA, Vote yes on ordinance to Ban Caste-Based Discrimination.
Date: Monday, February 13, 2023 at 12:35:29 PM Pacific Standard Time
From: Govind Acharya <govind73@gmail.com>
To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

Dear Councilmembers,

I write to you as the India Country Specialist for [Amnesty International USA](#). As you are no doubt aware, Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

On January 24, Tuesday, Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3, Central Seattle) introduced an ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle. I am writing in support of the ordinance, to urge your support and vote to pass the first-in-the-nation legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

Caste is a central phenomenon in South Asian society around the world. Caste transcends across religions in South Asian communities including the diaspora communities here in the United States of America. Though caste-based discrimination is now illegal in India, its impacts are still far-reaching and can manifest in every aspect of life. With the growing Indian diaspora in the United State of America, this pernicious system has been brought to the shores of our country.

Caste is an enabler of discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in education, workplace, housing, and employment not only all across the United States of America but also in cities like Seattle. According to a recent article I read in a recent [2022 article published by Seattle's Real Change](#) publication. "*Seattle is one of the cities where caste discrimination 'remains a largely hidden and unreported issue'*". The article quotes a spokesperson from the City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights, who wrote that "*Caste Status is not a recognized protected class in the City of Seattle and if our office were to receive a complaint based solely on caste discrimination, we would not be able to investigate it'*".

There are several public cases relating to caste discrimination Cisco case in California and the horrific human trafficking of "oppressed caste" Indian girls. But, importantly many private incidents that happen in cities like Seattle that do not come to light because there are no caste protections for the caste oppressed. The absence of a protection policy against caste-based discrimination has enabled and facilitated discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation of those born into the "lower castes"

The NAACP passed a resolution two years ago, opposing the practice of the caste

system in the United States. Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), AFL-CIO, and the California Democratic Party have endorsed caste equity and added it to their non-discrimination policies. The California State University system (the largest four-year public university system in the United States), and Brandeis University have both banned caste discrimination. The Alphabet Workers Union, which represents over a thousand Google workers, has said that the "fight for the civil rights of caste-oppressed people is a workers' fight." Additionally, even giant tech corporations like Apple and Amazon have added caste to their non-discriminatory policies in their respective employee handbooks

The legislation introduced by Councilmember Sawant will ban caste discrimination and the protection policies will bring visibility to, and address this "hidden and unreported issue". I urge you all to support Councilmember Kshama Sawant's legislation to ban caste discrimination. Your vote to outlaw caste discrimination will ensure legal protections for the caste-discriminated, reaffirm Seattle's commitment to recognizing the dignity of all its residents, workers, and visitors that does not subject them to prejudicial treatment, bias, and discrimination, and set a precedent for the whole nation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Govind Acharya
India Country Specialist
Amnesty International USA

pronouns: he/him/his [Why?](#)