

Subject: Stand for Human Rights. Vote YES on ordinance to Ban Caste-Based Discrimination
Date: Monday, February 13, 2023 at 12:39:20 PM Pacific Standard Time
From: Rita Meher <rita.meher@gmail.com>
To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

Dear Seattle City Council,

I'm Rita Meher, an Executive Director & co-founder of Tasveer, a non-profit organization that is driven to increase South Asian representation and promote diversity and inclusion in the films and arts over two decades. We run the largest South Asian Film Festival in the country. I have also produced other successful programs in Seattle, called Yoni Ki Baat, South Asian equivalent of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues, in addition to creating a new national fund for South Asian filmmakers, a Tasveer film fund, partnering with Netflix. Our films from Tasveer Film Festival are carried on Alaska Airlines.

I say all of this so you understand that while I have been immensely successful in America, there is something I want Seattle City Council members to know about what an important personal emotional moment this proposed ordinance banning caste discrimination announcement was for me on January 24th, 2023. For the first time in my life, I publicly came out as an Adivasi and I tweeted in support of this ordinance.

Adivasis are indigenous tribal people in India referred to as Scheduled Tribes in India. Along with Dalits who have faced untouchability, Adivasis are outside the caste system, and I have faced socio-economic ostracism growing up in India. I continue to face pernicious caste oppression in South Asian settings even here in Seattle. Until now, I have never talked publicly about my caste location as a caste-oppressed indigenous woman yet I have been discriminated against due to the other markers about me- from my name to the food I eat to knowing about my family background in India.

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". This legislation will ensure that "caste" is explicitly enshrined as a prohibited basis of discrimination and that necessary protections are in place in Seattle for caste-oppressed South Asian residents, workers, and visitors, who currently have no legal remedies.

I urge the Seattle City Council members to vote **YES** and to pass this ordinance banning caste discrimination as proposed by Councilwoman Kshama Sawant.

Sincerely,

Rita Meher
phone: 206-349-4478