

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I introduced a resolution calling for the United States to address the ongoing problem of untouchability in India. Last December Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recognized the similarities between untouchability in his country and Apartheid in South Africa. It is now time for this Congress, Mr. Speaker, to speak out about this ancient and particularly abhorrent form of persecution and segregation, even if it is occurring in a country many consider to be one of America's closest allies. This Congress must urge an end to the social discrimination and injustice faced by the nearly 250 million people known as Dalits and Tribals in India.

Although the Indian constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms for all Indians, the untouchables continue to face widespread social and caste injustices. Article 17 of the Constitution outlaws untouchability. However, despite numerous laws enacted for the protection and betterment of the Dalits and Tribals, they are still considered outcasts in Indian society and are treated as such.

At best, untouchability involves social segregation, including separate educational facilities and drinking water and restaurants. This is a sad and familiar tune to many of us familiar with the history of our own country. At worst, untouchability entails widespread violence against untouchable women, especially in the form of rape with impunity, being targeted for abortions, and comprises the majority of temple prostitute and women trafficked from India.

The untouchables are poor, Mr. Speaker. Their most basic needs are not fulfilled, and they face great difficulties in accessing employment, education, food, and health care. Most are among the poorest people on the face of the Earth, living on less than \$1 per day. Moreover, Dalit women are often sold into bondage, prostitution, and there is an increasing religious persecution against the Dalits and untouchables who change their faith. In 2005, USAID stopped funding an organization after it was revealed that they were preventing many of these women from leaving prostitution. In a recent instance, a whole Dalit village was forced to leave their tribal land because they had converted to Christianity in a state that had laws against conversion.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is a direct statement by the United States Congress that untouchability is an unacceptable practice on the part of America's largest trading partner and close ally. We appreciate that Prime Minister Singh and many others have recognized that this is a serious social problem that needs to be confronted, and we urge the rest of Indian society and American diplomats, aid workers, and businesses working in India to do the same and to work toward the eradication of caste discrimination in India.

This resolution encourages our government to work with India to find new approaches to an age-old problem. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this resolution will ensure that we as a government and we as an American people in no way encourage or enforce caste discrimination and untouchability through our policies with India or through foreign aid or direct aid in any way.

And I urge my colleagues to join me in calling on the Indian government and the world community to look with compassion upon India's untouchables and reach out to one of the poorest and most oppressed peoples on the face of the Earth.