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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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• (1305)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Order, please. This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[English]

This is our ninth meeting. It is March 26, 2009, and we have two distinguished guests. I will introduce them in a moment, but first I want to take care of a little housekeeping.

There will be no meeting on April 28. This is being done because it is the national day of mourning for workers killed and injured on the job, and there is a conflict. There is an event going on that many members will want to attend at that time.

Mr. Marston has indicated that he would speak to this matter, so go ahead, Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Yes, I really appreciate that, Mr. Chair, because this is a national day of mourning, as proclaimed in Parliament. It takes place all across our country. In Hamilton on that particular day we have an observance, and there is one here in Ottawa. If any members are interested, they may want to contact my office. There is a bus going to a monument here to mark the occasion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now let me turn to our main order of business today. We have two distinguished guests. Dr. Joseph D'souza is the president of Dalit Freedom Network Canada, and joining him today is Harvey Thiessen, who is the executive director of Operation Mobilization Canada.

My understanding is that Dr. D'souza will have a 10-minute presentation and that Mr. Thiessen is here to provide assistance, but does not actually have a formal presentation. Is that correct? All right.

In that case, Dr. D'souza, I invite you to begin, please.

Dr. Joseph D'souza (President, Dalit Freedom Network Canada): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for the privilege and honour of testifying before you on a very important subject that is related not only to India and its people, but also to the whole world.

We all know that for the past 60 years India has had a thriving democracy, great institutions of law, a tremendous judiciary, a great executive, and development on many fronts. As an Indian, I am very proud of the progress that we have made in the last 60 years and where we stand in the community of nations. I am very proud of all of the instruments of government that are available for executing law and justice.

However, we do have a huge social disease. It is called the caste system. Coming out of the caste system we have a group of people—formerly known as the untouchables, today known as the Dalits—who have been called human history's longest-standing slaves. Those of us who are aware know that caste is the socio-economic stratification of people in South Asia and in India.

Untouchability is a practice that our constitution outlawed in article 17, because it is a practice that is so heinous and so deplorable that it consigns 25% of our population by birth to a discriminatory status in society. There are nearly 180 million of scheduled caste, or untouchables, in India, and another 70 million tribals, all of them lumped outside the caste system and without rights of many kinds.

Let me illustrate for you the current problem we have with the Dalits in India. Every week 13 Dalits are murdered. Every week six Dalit homes are burned. Every day six Dalits are abducted and kidnapped. Every day three Dalit women are raped, and a crime is committed with impunity against Dalits every 18 minutes of the day.

We have stated that when it comes to the issue of modern slavery and degradation of human beings, the Dalits today stand as human history's and civilization's last-standing slave system. While we have the laws forbid untouchability, in practice, in the vast number of cases, there is neither enforcement of the law nor a change in the prejudiced attitude of society, and the fate of these millions continues to become worse as the decades go on.

• (1310)

Most of you here have probably seen *Slumdog Millionaire*, which won several Oscars and many other awards, including awards at the Toronto International Film Festival. Most of the Dalits in India are from the slumdog world. About 70% of India at this present time lives on less than one dollar a day. We have two Indias: the India that's shining, and the India of *Slumdog Millionaire*. By and large, a vast percentage of the Dalit people make up the world of the slumdog millionaire.

What is particularly terrifying and heartbreaking is that these same Dalits who are untouchables in every way—that is, with no access to religious places or to drinking water from the village well, with double the seating system in schools, and suffering from discrimination in the workplace and in the village, since every village is two villages—these same Dalits are the primary victims of human trafficking in India.

I want to point out to this committee that on the issue of human trafficking, India stands as the single largest nation where human trafficking is going on. In 2005, a U.S. State Department report said that India is the source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purpose of forced or bonded labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Here is the stark statistic: 2.3 million women and girls are trafficked in India for the sex trade. Out of that, 67% are Dalit women and girls, who are bought and sold in the sex trade. When it comes to bonded labour and bonded slavery, it's very difficult to give the statistics, but Human Rights Watch contends that there are anywhere between 20 million and 60 million bonded slaves and labourers in India, mostly children.

This problem of untouchability, Dalit discrimination, and caste discrimination has been going on for nearly 2,000 years. A great and noble effort was made by the founding fathers of our nation to deal with this problem through the constitutional banning of untouchability; later, privileges of affirmative action were given to the Dalits through the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes legislation. What do we find, 60 years on, since independence? A minuscule Dalit population has profited from the affirmative action. A minuscule population has found some protection, but for the vast majority nothing has changed.

A devastating report created by ActionAid in 2005 showed that 80% of India's villages not only practise but enforce—I repeat, enforce—the practice of untouchability. After years of campaigning, in New Delhi in 2007 the current Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, became the first prime minister to publicly admit, in a Dalit conference, that the problem of untouchability is equal to the problem of apartheid in South Africa.

• (1315)

If you forget whatever I've said today, please do not forget that statement: the problem of untouchability in India is equal to the problem of apartheid in South Africa. The only difference, and it's a big difference, is that far more people are affected by this practice; as I said, it is 250 million, compared to those millions who suffered under the apartheid system in South Africa.

In closing this presentation, I have quotes from two men. One, the father of the Dalit liberation movement and a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi, writing in the *The New York Times*, said in 1934:

The world will abolish the problem of slavery as seen in the West, but it will not be that easy to demolish the problem of untouchability. It will take nothing less than the concerted and united opinion of the whole world to bring an end to untouchability, India's modern slavery.

That is one statement, honourable members of this committee. The other statement is from another parliamentarian in the British Parliament 200 years ago. He was the man who fought and brought an end to the cross-Atlantic slave trade, William Wilberforce, a contemporary of Prime Minister Pitt. He proclaimed 200 years ago

in the British Parliament that caste discrimination is “a system at war with truth and nature”.

It is at war with truth. What truth? The equality of all human beings.

What is it at war with, in terms of nature? It denies to another human being, just on the basis of birth and heredity and ensuing occupation, the equal freedoms we all enjoy as human beings.

Thank you very much.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. D'souza.

We will commence with the questioning. I'll just mention that in order to make everything fit, I propose we return to our traditional practice of seven-minute first-round questions, followed by five minutes in the second round, and I encourage members to be as concise as they can be.

With that, Professor Cotler, please go ahead.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank Dr. D'souza for his testimony here today.

Dr. D'souza, I was in Durban for the World Conference against Racism in 2001. From your biography, I note that you might have been there as well. That conference, as you know, was intended to be a conference against racism and to give expression to the under-represented cases and causes, such as the case of the Dalits.

My own experience was that in fact the Dalit cause did not get appropriate representation at Durban. Could you comment on that?

Second, given the very compelling evidence you've provided today in terms of untouchable slavery, institutionalized discrimination, human trafficking, and the like, why is it that the Dalits are such an under-represented case and cause in the international human rights agenda?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Thank you, sir.

You're right. Durban actually was the first global meeting at which Dalits finally managed at least to come and be present, even though they were not given a full place at the table for discussion.

Problem number two has been an ongoing battle with the Indian political establishment, which for the past 60 years, unfortunately, has by and large represented the interests of the upper castes. In terms of getting into the UN resolution, discrimination by descent is condemned by the UN resolution, and that should include discrimination based on caste, because caste is an issue of discrimination on the basis of birth, on the basis of who you are born and where you are born in the caste system. There is not a single Indian anywhere in the world, of whatever religion, who is not born into a particular caste and caste position. There is not a single Indian who does not know the position he was born into.

That was the Durban conference. My hope here is that Canada, in its interventions in the United Nations, will take the lead in UN deliberations. Another conference, Durban 2, is taking place soon under the auspices of the new human rights commission. It is a review, and my hope is that Canada will take the lead in bringing this issue to the fore.

You asked why, given the size and the scope of the problem, that it has not become the issue it should be. The answer to this, sir, is simply that apart from the last decade and a half, in the global sphere the Dalits have been completely voiceless. Today the Dalits of India are asking conscientized Indians of all professions, including politicians, and conscientized global society, to please become their voice. Because there is no voice, and because the propaganda machine works in another direction, this knowledge is not known.

• (1325)

The Chair: You have three minutes, Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As someone who was at Durban and who spoke up there on behalf on the Dalits, I just want to say that they were not given a voice, and that was because the World Conference against Racism in Durban, which was supposed to be the first 21st century conference against racism in the name of human rights, turned into a conference against Israel and Jews. I mention that point because the government has taken the decision not to attend Durban 2 because it was going down the same road, to be a repeat of Durban 1, so it will not be a forum within which we will be able to make the case in cause.

My question to you is this: are there other arenas we should enter or other initiatives that you think we should be taking in that regard?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Yes. There is an International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in the UN, the CERD committee, at which a lot of nations have a voice. That committee has gone into detail. In a report released on March 9, 2007, when they called the Indian government before them, they raised a huge amount of very serious concerns. We would again urge Canada to use whatever influence it can to see that the recommendations of that committee are followed. India has been asked to come back in a year to give a report.

I'll read to you a couple of concerns that were raised by the CERD committee. On point number 13, it says:

The Committee urges the State party to intensify its efforts to enforce the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955), especially in rural areas, including by effectively punishing acts of "Untouchability", to take effective measures against segregation in public schools and residential segregation, and to ensure equal access for Dalits places of worship, hospitals, water sources and any other places or services intended for use by the general public.

This is nothing but a blatant description of apartheid in practice and the urging of this committee of the UN to do something about it.

Another one is in point 15, and then I'll stop. It says:

The Committee urges [the Indian government] to effectively prosecute and punish perpetrators of acts of sexual violence and exploitation of Dalit and tribal women, sanction anyone preventing or discouraging victims from reporting such incidents, including police and other law enforcement officers, [and] take preventive measures such as police training

to stop violence against Dalit women and girls.

Thank you, sir.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Dorion, please, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): I am going to speak French.

In listening to you, I get the impression that a significant part of Indian society recognizes the falsehood on which this practice of untouchability is based. You mentioned that India's founding fathers made the system of untouchability illegal under the constitution.

Why is it that, 60 years after independence, no one has succeeded in solving the problem? How would the so-called higher castes be disadvantaged if the system of untouchability were abolished? Are there major economic interests behind untouchability or does it survive only because of the strength of religious and cultural traditions?

• (1330)

[English]

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Thank you, sir.

The situation with regard to the discrimination against the Dalits and their situation in view of a constitution that condemned untouchability in its practice is very similar to what happened in the United States with regard to the problem of racism and blatant slavery, even though there was a constitution that declared that all men were equal before God. Society itself never accepted that ideology but continued to operate on what they believed was the proper ideology, and that is the inequality of human beings.

This problem in India is a socio-economic construct. While we have a constitution that states one thing, we have a society that operates and runs on caste mores, caste policies, and caste guidelines. I'm embarrassed and ashamed to say that the problem of caste discrimination, which is unique to India, has been carried by Indians wherever they have gone, including to your great nation of Canada. That's because it is a societal way of looking at fellow human beings. Why don't we dismantle untouchability when it is in the interests of the nation? We constantly ask why a vast majority of the 250 million Dalits and tribals are still kept in oppressive situations.

There are definitely economic dimensions. If you accept the figure that there are close to anywhere from 40 million to 100 million bonded labourers of one kind or another in India, you can imagine the economic profit that cheap labour brings to everybody, and nobody wants to dismantle that system. Secondly, with the emergence of human trafficking and the sexual trade, and the complete vulnerability of Dalit women, girls and boys, and the fact that this is becoming a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide, again economics becomes a means of perpetuating the system. I am ashamed, embarrassed, and even heartbroken to inform you, sir, that in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where I live, there is village after village where you will not find one girl child above the age of five, because all the girl children in those Dalit tribal villages have been sold into sexual trafficking. So economics is one reason this situation continues.

The third thing, sir, is the grab for a slice of political power in India. The moment the Dalits and the tribals are empowered and exercise their political rights in their own way, and not because of what some landlord is telling them, the political equations in the country change. So there are political issues also at play, because of which this has continued. Every time, as a previous president said in recent years, Dalits have tried to assert their rights, there has been a tremendous backlash. In fact, today there are more atrocities against Dalits than there were even before independence. Those atrocities are linked with their trying to assert their rights, to which there is a backlash.

● (1335)

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately, the time has just expired.

Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, in Hamilton, my own community, we had an organization we called the Strengthening Hamilton's Community initiative. It came out of the fire bombing of a Hindu samaj. I served on that for three and a half years. The wonderful part of that tragedy was the bringing together of so many different communities. But one of the things I've learned is that racism is a learned behaviour and that education is probably the only way or the most significant way of dealing with it.

Mr. Cotler referred to Durban and what happened there. It's one of those sad times, because the interventions that could have taken place.... The report that came out of Durban is, for the most part, reasonable. The activities that took place outside of there were horrendous. I think anybody who pauses to think about things at all would be very troubled by it.

In my area as the human rights critic for the NDP, I'm often visited by delegations from countries in South America. They often talk about the paramilitaries, death squads, and things of that nature. They talk about impunity. When you first started speaking, you might have noticed that I started taking notes right away, because "impunity" is a word you don't usually associate with a democracy. That was very troubling to hear.

I would note that we have a copy of the Universal Periodic Review of India, which has been provided for us. I noticed the size of this. The one done in Canada is five times thicker than this, and yet you have to wonder what the difference is. Why is that happening in that fashion? Is there something systemic happening?

You mentioned, Dr. D'souza, the propaganda machine. I think the implication in your remarks was that this is a government machine. Are we saying that the government is involved with the systemic continuation of the caste system?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: What I'm saying is that there are forces in all of our political parties who, when they come to power, have a hidden agenda of perpetuating the caste system and holding to the caste system, and then giving the spin to the rest of the world that the caste system is gone from India.

When we began this campaign globally about a dozen years ago, I remember being in front of parliamentarians in Germany and their defence minister, in the middle of the testimony like this, just

blurting out, "I thought the caste system was abolished at independence by Mahatma Gandhi." Then I had to respond, and I said, "Madam, Mahatma Gandhi tried his best. The sad truth is the caste system is not demolished, but it is well, alive, and very strong in modern India."

Mr. Wayne Marston: I'm holding in my hands a newspaper report, coincidentally, from today's *Toronto Star*. It's an article about Kumari Mayawati. This is a woman born into the Dalit caste. It says she was born into the lowest caste, and she's "trying to make history as she stirs controversy". That is very much in line with what you're saying to us today. She is a 53-year-old school teacher who, just in being that, has raised herself from the normal expectations of how a Dalit would succeed.

What do you think her chances of actually succeeding are?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: She is one of the bright spots of current Dalit politics. She's single, herself a victim of social abuse, so she knows first-hand what it is not only to be Dalit but what it is to be abused as a woman. She has built in one state—the state of Uttar Pradesh, which has a significant Dalit population and a significant Muslim population—an alliance, which now makes her quite a formidable political power in that one state.

Given the nature of Indian politics, which is fast replicating what you have in Canada with what looks like coalition politics, one can say with certainty no one party will get a majority in the next elections. So in an era of coalition politics, anybody with 30 or 40 MPs out of the 550-plus in parliament can aspire to a prime minister's slot. That's where that story is coming from.

● (1340)

Mr. Wayne Marston: So you really don't hold much....

Dr. Joseph D'souza: No.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Marston.

Mr. Hiebert and Ms. Smith have indicated that they would like to divide the seven minutes that would normally just go to Mr. Hiebert.

I'll let you divide it as you see fit.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Dr. D'souza, for being here today.

Dr. D'souza, many Canadians will be familiar with the challenges of your organization if they've seen the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, which you yourself referred to. Can you tell this committee whether the abuse, the maiming, and the trafficking of children and others in the movie was accurately portrayed? How common is this situation?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: I wrote a blog as soon as *Slumdog* came out, before it became an Oscar-winning and award-winning movie. I knew there would be controversy. In the blog, I wrote that this was an accurate description of life in India for the 70% majority, especially for the Dalits and for the tribals.

I can tell you about a case that has had national attention, that has taken the country by storm in terms of stirring up the national conscience. Eighteen months ago in Nithari, just outside of Delhi, a business-caste person was kidnapping children and then, if they were girls, sexually abusing them. They were also sexually abusing boys. Later on, they took some of the boys and sold their body parts, killing the whole lot and dumping them into a well, which the police discovered by accident.

Then you had parents coming on national television, saying, "I came to the police 18 months ago, when my child disappeared. The police wouldn't do anything. They wouldn't register the case. Now they are telling me that my child was one of those kidnapped and killed."

This is, sadly, highly prevalent. Because of the Nithari case, which is now so much in the public eye, there was a recent report that in the capital city of New Delhi—in New Delhi—six children go missing daily. Two years ago, when the Nithari story burst out, national non-governmental organizations came up with the figure that India possibly has one million missing children—one million missing children who were kidnapped, abducted, blinded, amputated, and sold into the market.

At the Dalit Freedom Network, we wanted to look at the caste background of all of the children kidnapped in the Nithari case. We knew who the primary victims were. I'm disappointed to report to you that we have it on record that 70% of all of those children came from Dalit families. The rest came from what is called low-caste, or backward-caste, families. One family was a Muslim family. There was not a single upper-caste victim there.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You mentioned in your testimony that this is a problem the world over. We're focusing on this issue in India, but can you give us any idea of the degree to which this problem has migrated to Canada?

• (1345)

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Human trafficking, the selling of children and the abduction or deception of children, has become a larger problem. As the U.S. State Department report says, India is the destination and the source. Now there is evidence of Indian children and girls being trafficked into Middle Eastern states and other places, including Burma, the U.K., the U.S., and even Canada.

A story broke last year in the U.S. that minor children were brought into the home of a rich upper-caste family. The children had basically been trafficked. They were abused and sexually violated. The whole thing became a media thing and spilled over. Now we are extremely concerned when any Indian couple or family wants to take servants who are minors outside of India, because this has become a primary conduit for human trafficking across the world. When children are taken out through these means, or through adoption, it's a means of trafficking our Dalit children.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I'd like to share the balance of my time.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Smith, you have two minutes.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Doctor. I'm so glad that you came today. Your voice here at this

committee in Canada means a great deal, because human trafficking is a global concern, and it's one we're addressing here in Canada right now.

Having said that, do you have any ideas as to how to bring this up to the global conscience radar screen? I'll give you an example. Here in Canada, I was very surprised when I became a parliamentarian that no parliamentarians knew much about human trafficking. If I hadn't had a policeman son, and if I hadn't been on the streets with the victims, I wouldn't have known either. You're talking about something in India that has gone on for a very long time. Have there been any talks at the government level in India with Canada and the United States about how we could make this awareness come to light? *Slumdog Millionaire*, the motion picture that just came out, was very compelling, and now I believe is a very good time to take action and move forward on it.

Do you have any ideas in that area?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: There is an increasing amount of material now available in India and many other places about the size and the scope of the problem. I think one idea is to bring awareness to all our lawmakers across the world about the size of this problem. This is not a small issue. Modern slavery—human trafficking—is bigger and worse than slavery ever was in South Africa or the United States 200 years ago when people were taking slaves out of Africa. It is far worse. Far more millions are now being trafficked and sold into modern slavery.

Just bringing that awareness, and then the appropriate legislation, and then intervention in terms of education and getting into these communities.... The honourable member said one answer to this is to increase the available resources in providing education for these communities that have no hope for their children.

Mrs. Joy Smith: In terms of the immigration system, often these children from other countries are brought in. We apprehended six children—I can't really speak about the case—in Montreal about three weeks ago. They were being flown in from another country. Tell me what you think Canada and other countries could do to ensure that these children coming through our borders are legitimately coming in for the purposes that they are designated to come in for? They're coming in under false pretences in droves. These people are accompanying them, and then they're putting them out for sexual exploitation.

Do you have any ideas on that?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: One principle that we are suggesting is that when non-relatives—meaning not family, somebody who is not related—are bringing a child into the country, antecedental research be done and a trail be made before they're allowed. If you don't do that, you won't know where they came from, who brought them, what certificates they have, who their parents are, what their address is. In India this is all abduction. In many places, it's all lies. "You come and I'll give you a new job. I'll take you to Bombay." And the next thing they know, they are put in the gulf. So there are no antecedents; there's no documentation, nothing. There must be a search and a demand that without proper documentation on where minors are coming from, they just cannot bring these children, however wealthy they are. This should not be driven by the economic competency of somebody who's bringing kids into the country.

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, that uses up the time. I actually allowed you to go two minutes over.

Mr. Silva is next, and then Mr. Sweet. I just want to make the point here that Mr. Hiebert is making a statement in the House immediately at 2 p.m., and our two guests wanted to go and watch that. On that basis, I think we have to be quite strict in enforcing the two remaining time slots at five minutes each.

Mr. Silva, please.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The questions that were raised today are quite important, especially on the issues of human trafficking and child trafficking, because those are things we're all concerned about, wherever in the world they take place. We certainly can't single out any countries, because we know this is happening throughout the world. We even hear cases of it happening here in Canada. So we're very much alarmed and concerned about the whole issue of both human trafficking and child trafficking.

When you speak about the untouchables, the Dalits, which you say represent about 180 million people, we know that India is a democracy—it's the world's largest democracy—and 180 million people represent a sizable amount of the population and a sizable voting bloc. What is the representation they have? I was told that in fact there are ministers from the Dalit community as well, so the impression I'm getting is that they have no voice, but in fact they do have some voice because they're able to vote in India, because it's a democracy.

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Yes. We have to accept and admit that provisions were given in the constitution to the Dalits in a variety of areas called reservations or affirmative actions. Policies were also given in the political sphere, where reserved constituencies were kept for the Dalits, and a certain amount of reserved constituencies of Dalits are brought into Parliament.

It is also true that increasingly there is an emerging strong voice among the Dalits about their political and their social rights within the nation, but compare it to the size of the problem when the government classifies the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribes as 250 million people. Compared to this, sir, as a bloc, was the 5%

Brahmin upper caste in the nation, who systematically have ruled every political sphere and party in India for 60 years. No Dalit party or group has had anywhere near even a 10% political influence in the country for 60 years.

When you look at the caste breakdown and what is playing out in Indian politics, the sad thing is that 60 years on, after independence, when 25% population is outcast and discriminated against, the political processes should long have led them to have a huge say in governance, a huge say in the vehicles of government, etc. They are still fighting. The Dalits in India, including the politicians, are still fighting for a seat in the Supreme Court among the justices. They are still fighting.

That is the anomaly and the paradox of India. At one level this is going on, and there is the positive side, but on the other side is a social system that is not allowing this to become what it should be. If the system is abolished, there is a level, equal playing field.

Mr. Mario Silva: I've heard your comments, but I just wanted to get clarification. Would you characterize this whole situation as apartheid? Apartheid has been used somewhat loosely here. The situation with what happened in South Africa was a monstrous, hideous situation, where in fact the blacks were living in slave-like conditions and did not have a voice to exercise electorally. They didn't have a voice or anything at all in terms of mobility and so forth. Would you consider that the Dalits in India are in the same situation?

• (1355)

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Dalit leaders who came to Durban, sir, in South Africa carried banners saying that caste is worse than apartheid. The fact that a running prime minister of the country has compared untouchability to apartheid, whether it is actually playing out as apartheid played out in South Africa—

Mr. Mario Silva: Thank you for your remarks, but I just wanted to get clarification from you: do you consider it apartheid?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: I consider the practice of untouchability worse than apartheid.

Mr. Mario Silva: That's all I wanted to know.

The Chair: Thank you, then, Mr. Silva.

Our last questioner is Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): I'll try to be as brief as I can.

You mentioned villages with no girls over five years old, and then you mentioned a term that I want you to clarify. You said they were sold into slavery. Are you suggesting that, because of years and generations of degradation, some of the Dalits actually are complicit in keeping their own kin and brothers and sisters captive?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Years of degradation and centuries of degradation, etc., have compounded the problem. A host of issues are at play. One of the great issues at play, because of a society that does not give equal value to human beings, is the value of a girl child. So Dalit parents are complicit in selling their children, especially a girl child, because the girl child is a beast of burden.

Mr. David Sweet: I have six children. I can't even fathom that. I can't approach that at all.

You said not a single Indian around the world does not know what caste they're from. Do you think that because in fact some emigrate to western society and then deny the fact that there is a caste system, it also worsens the situation?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Sir, the caste system has been shielded—the impact, and the way the caste system works out. There are children of the upper caste who are shielded from that by their parents and all, so there is that growing consonance in India, which is largely urban, that would say it is not there.

All they have to do is move out of their urban context, 30 kilometres outside of Mumbai or Delhi, and then they find this is at work where they are. They know where they are because caste plays one of its pivotal roles in marriage. Inter-caste marriage between a Dalit and an upper-caste person is such a complex thing.

You have had your own case in Canada. A Sikh woman had her own daughter and low-caste husband from India murdered because she married inter-caste. These kinds of honour killings are going on from both sides, with the Dalits and the upper caste participating when it comes to marriage.

Marriage is where it all plays out—who you marry. People make sure they marry within that particular caste frame. Anybody who dares, then, is under threat and persecution.

Mr. David Sweet: Dr. D'souza, thank you very much. Time is always our enemy here. My estimate is that you probably have 60 seconds.

We desire to increase our trade with India. Business people are going to desire to increase their trade. What can Canadian business people do to make sure they are not complicit in this, to assure that they're factors in ending the problem, not aiding and abetting it?

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Sir, just as there are the Sullivan Principles in relation to apartheid in South Africa, we have developed a set of principles called the Ambedkar Principles, which I'd be more than happy to send. You all can have them. The Ambedkar Principles guide industries and companies in their association with India so that when they go out....

We want everybody to do a lot of business with India. We need economic development and all of this opening up of the economy. We can see both the positives and negatives of globalization. We want Canadian businesses to be aware when they go out to India, so that they're not unknowingly perpetuating caste discrimination. We want to have, in dealings with Canada and America, people on boards and on committees so that when they're recruiting and placing they do so with knowledge of how this works.

We are not asking at all for affirmative benefits for Dalits. We are just asking for equal opportunity, that's all.

● (1400)

The Chair: Thank you to both of our witnesses today.

I'll just mention to both witnesses, if you have any documents such as what was just discussed, please submit them to the clerk. He'll ensure that they are translated into both official languages. They can then be circulated to all committee members and become part of our records.

That completes our questioning. We've arrived at the end of our time. Given that our witnesses would like to go to see Mr. Hiebert's SO 31, which, I believe, is a statement on the subject of the plight of the Dalits, I'm going to ask them to be escorted up by my assistant, Sarah LaFreniere. That completes our meeting for today.

Dr. Joseph D'souza: Thank you.

The Chair: We are adjourned.

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