



# National Dalit Election Watch

Date: 23.04.2009

Ref. No: 01/DL/PR-1

## Press Release

Over the past few years the electoral process in India has been significantly reformed due to the proactive approach of the Election Commission. But violent strategies are deployed by dominant caste vested interests to either prevent Dalits from voting or to force them to vote for candidates against their wish. This pervades elections at all levels – from Loksabha to Panchayats.

Considering this serious situation which threatens to subvert the very basis of our democracy, several civil society leaders, NGOs and social activists have come together to constitute the National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW). The NDEW has identified and 1000 highly sensitive polling stations in over 200 constituencies across 13 states. These are polling stations where strong possibility of Dalits being intimidated, threatened or prevented from exercising their franchise. Activists and volunteers are diligently watching these polling stations and reports to the EC regarding any electoral offence that undermines the right of franchise of Dalit voters.

The first phase of the 2009 General Elections has proved the worst of our fears; that intimidation and violence against the Dalit voters are increasing by the day. There are a large number of villages where the Dalits decide to keep silent about the threats and intimidation due to fear of socio-economic boycott or of reprisal attacks. Obviously in those areas there would be no visible, reported violence. Where the Dalits assert, or even attempt to exercise their franchise, there is violence.

The National Dalit Election Watch covered over 3325 Polling Stations in 209 Parliamentary Constituencies in 13 states. Over 3690 volunteers watched these stations for any electoral offences that would undermine the exercise of franchise of the Dalit communities. Several complaints have started flowing into our SCRs and the NCR. There have been complaints of Dalits being threatened not to vote, of election identity cards being forcibly taken away, booth capturing etc.

In the course of our efforts to contact the EC officials we came across serious lapses which proved to be serious obstacles to the process of forwarding complaints – be it telephonic or through fax. While in Bihar we found that during the forenoon the observers were available on their mobile phones and they could take up a number of complaints and act on them, by afternoon they had switched off their mobiles and were inaccessible; and this was the time that the violations were moving towards their peak. In UP most of the observers were not accessible on phones due to wrong numbers given in the EC website or due to the fact they were switched off.

It is clear that the vulnerability mapping of the EC needs to be revamped completely; it is geared to controlling and observing visible violent incidents, and not to the invisible and silent threats and intimidation of Dalit voters.

We have written a letter to the CEOs and the CEC demanding that their complaint mechanism on crucial days before and during polling should be fine tuned if they have to achieve results especially pertaining to

**Mr. Prasad Chacko**  
09426727144  
National Coordinator

**Safdar Ali**  
9213378753  
Media & Comm. Officer-NCDHR