

EHRC rebukes government over failure to act on caste discrimination

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The Equality and Human Rights Commission has criticised the government's failure to legislate on caste discrimination, in a move the National Secular Society has described as a "serious rebuke".

The government recently [announced](#) that it would not explicitly recognise caste-based discrimination under equality legislation. At the time the NSS said the decision showed "callous disregard for victims".

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has now [told *The Hindu*](#) that the government has "missed a crucial opportunity" and left victims of caste discrimination with "limited legal protection".

"Victims of caste discrimination will continue to have limited legal protection by the government ruling out a change in the law and restricting the scope of protection to what can be interpreted through case law.

"The government has missed a crucial opportunity to improve legal clarity and has taken a step back by looking to repeal the duty to include caste as an aspect of race in the Equality Act 2010. This is inconsistent with the UK's international obligations to provide for separate and distinct protection for caste in our legislation.

"While we welcome the government's commitment to produce guidance for employers, service providers and landlords on the sort of conduct that would be unlawful under the Equality Act, it does not replace the need for separate and distinct protection against caste discrimination in the law."

The EHRC is an independent statutory body with the [responsibility](#) to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Britain.

The UN has also repeatedly called on the government to pass legislation as a treaty obligation. In 2013 parliament ordered the government to legislate, although the government has now [said](#) it will invite parliament to repeal this duty.

The NSS's chief executive Stephen Evans said the government should reconsider its position in light of the criticism.

"Theresa May should take heed of this serious rebuke and think again before failing to honour both our international human rights obligations and our moral obligation to protect those in our society vulnerable to this form of discrimination.

"Refusing to take notice of both the UN and the public body set up to enforce compliance with equality and human rights obligations seriously tarnishes the government's human rights record. It also illustrates the strength of the vested interests that don't want to see legislation to outlaw caste discrimination introduced."

In 2010 [research](#) from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research found evidence of

caste-based discrimination, harassment and bullying in employment, education and in the provision of services. The research estimated that between 50,000 and 200,000 people living in the UK were at risk of caste discrimination.

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