



International Commission for Dalit Rights

BOLDLINE THE P3 ACCELERATOR

Date Issued: August 8, 2018

Proposal Due Date: August 23, 2018

Time Due for Proposal: 12 a.m. ET

Proposal Submitted Date: August 21, 2018

Subject: Boldline Partnership Accelerator on Religious Freedom: Dalit Lawyers Initiative

Dear Boldline P3 Accelerator,

The U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Partnerships, invites us to submit a proposal for the above referenced challenge. The anticipated period performance is a base period of 12 months plus a three-day partnership building accelerator program in Washington, D.C. The statement of **Boldline Religious Freedom Challenge: Dalit Lawyers Initiative** is provided herewith.

The International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR International) is a global policy advocacy and networking organization leading a global movement of people striving to eliminate Caste or Work and Descent-based Discrimination (CWDD), inequality and injustice. We campaign for the religious freedom, rights and dignity of nearly 280 million Dalits, tribes, marginalized and underprivileged people in South Asia who face religious oppression and caste discrimination.

With over 255 members across the globe, ICDR collaborates, networks, and provides technical support for its associates, civil society, government agencies, and the communities, as they strive to promote religious freedom, equal opportunities, civil rights, dignity, and rule of law. We empower Dalits, marginalized and underprivileged people, who often face disproportionate challenges and obstacles to live a dignified life. We investigate, expose discrimination, educate and mobilize the public, provide community services, and campaign to leverage for changes in policy and transform societies.

ICDR staff consists of professionals, including lawyers, development practitioners, policy-makers, advocates, country experts, journalists, and academics of diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Established in 2006, ICDR is known for its international policy advocacy, impartial reporting, effective coordination and mobilization of diverse organizations, media, and collaboration with targeted civil society organizations.

We would appreciate your invitation in the **Ministerial Conference to Advance Religious Freedom** hosted by the Department of State from July 23-26, 2018. We are seeking to

participate in a three-day partnership building accelerator program that will take place in late October 2018 in Washington, D.C.

ICDR appreciates your time and interest to speak with us about this important initiative. I am excited to share more details with you in late October, 2018. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at dbsagar@icdrintl.org or **Neha Kumar**, Vice President at Neha@icdrintl.org.

Best Regards,



Dil Bishkarma

President and Founder

International Commission for Dalit Rights

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Boldline Religious Freedom Challenge- Dalit Lawyers Initiative

Problem Statement:

Religious oppression against Dalits (Scheduled Caste/Tribes/untouchable/marginalized people) is reported to be the world's oldest social and religious stigma, preventing nearly 280 million people from practicing their religious freedom in South Asia. It is estimated that the number of victims from religious oppression and caste discrimination to be in the hundreds of thousands each year.

Though the caste system has been legally abolished for over 50 years, it is still an entrenched part of South Asian culture and an important but contentious dimension of the Hindu religion. Reports from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination describe systematic abuse of Dalits, including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence against Dalit women. In India, Ministry of Home Affairs 2016/17 data showed 703 incidents of religious violence took place, which killed 86 persons and injured 2,321. In Nepal, the National Human Rights Commission reported that Dalit women were disproportionately victimized. Human Rights Watch confirms that Dalit and tribal women are victims of rape more often than women with other caste affiliations in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Department of State's *Human Rights Report 2017* found that "Societal violence based on religion and caste and by religiously associated groups continued to be a serious concern." It also reported widespread discrimination, including prohibiting Dalits from accessing public resources, participating in temple festivals, or using certain cremation grounds. Such discrimination, while not directly perpetrated by the governments, remains a part of everyday culture as laws protecting Dalits are not adequately enforced by government officials.

Idea:

Legal litigation and advocacy have a significant role in advancing religious freedom, peace, security and growth. Dalit Lawyers Initiative (the Initiative) will develop innovative legal programs that address this problem collectively with law firms, universities, government agencies, tech firms, and members of civil society in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Initiative will create a transnational/transregional network of Dalit lawyers that will litigate on behalf of victims to access justice. The law firms, a law professor and ICDR will create a curriculum addressing legal services and religious freedom and provide training and mentorship. ICDR will coordinate, monitor and evaluate, provide connections with Dalit lawyers, and prepare briefers on relevant legal and religious freedom issues. The State Department will provide funding and receive reports on outcomes. This collaboration will result in: improved access to legal advocacy and Dalit and tribal communities, and greater religious freedom for Dalits and tribals in targeted communities.

This Initiative will help achieve the US Government's commitment to assisting emerging democracies in strengthening freedom of religion. The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2017*¹ noted that South Asian countries have religious freedom issues involving caste, such as limitations on full religious participation and boycotts of persons who do not marry within caste.

The Initiative has a high potential for success, as evidenced by the success of a similar project in which Nepali female lawyers were provided with training from top lawyers in the U.S., Canada and Australia.²

Resource Requirements:

ICDR needs \$50,000 to accomplish this project. These funds will go toward:

- selection of 30 Dalit lawyers;
- compilation of training materials;
- travel and accommodation expenses for trainers and trainees;
- legal assistance incentives for 150 cases across South Asia;
- coordination, monitoring and reporting on the Initiative;
- creation of an online knowledge hub and platform to upload training materials and connect Dalit lawyers for networking; and
- strengthening the use of emerging technologies in legal investigations and prosecutions and provision of remote support.

American law firms will assign lawyers to provide pro-bono training and mentoring. Dalit civil society organizations and law firms will assign Dalit lawyers for training and mentoring on legal services and promotion of religious freedom. Following the legal professional training, the Initiative will support the provision of competent legal services to 150 victim individuals and their families. This project will provide the lawyers' opportunities to build experience and client-based marketing so that they can gain trust from potential clients, as well as the ability to compete professionally with lawyers from dominant castes. The project will compensate these lawyers based on the nature and numbers of cases they handle or litigate. Building on longstanding work in the field, the Initiative will provide remote support and ongoing monitoring using modern technologies. The Initiative will also work with legal partners to conduct open source investigations for legal accountability and convene experts to establish protocols for digital evidence.

Best Potential Partners (250 words max):

¹ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281022>;

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281030>

² <http://labusinessjournal.com/news/2018/apr/19/most-influential-women-attorneys-women-lawyers-nep/>

The Initiative's partners will comprise lawyers from firms with a strong pro-bono focus. According to The American Lawyer³, the top ten firms in this legal area are:

- Jenner & Block;
- Covington & Burling
- Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe
- Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler
- Hughes Hubbard & Reed
- Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher
- Buckley Sandler
- Dechert
- Ropes & Gray
- Paul Hastings

We will source partners from these firms, ideally engaging five lawyers, each with a different specialization. In addition to these lawyers, we will engage an academic/subject matter expert to help develop a tailored curriculum for training. ICDR has contacts at Brandeis University (**Dr. Rajesh Sampath**), Indiana University (**Prof. Kevin D. Brown**), Rutgers University (**Kenya Tyson, Esq.**), Colorado College (**Dr. Purvi Mehta**), American University Washington College of Law, and the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, who could provide technical support and complete this assignment. Likewise, [D.B. Sagar](#), ICDR's founder and Nepali-American US citizen, provides expertise on international human rights law, and facilitates networking of civil society. **Richard Gold**, Co-Chair of ICDR, and former Head of the USAID's Rule of Law Division, provides technical leadership for human rights and rule of law. **Ms. Neha Kumar**, an Australian lawyer and ICDR Vice President, coordinates the project team.

Ideal End State:

The key outcome we are seeking from the Initiative is creation of a network of 30 Dalit lawyers who feel more confident in their abilities and who have the expertise to fight for Dalit communities on issues of religious freedom and other basic human rights in their home countries. Secondary outcomes from this initiative are:

1. Increased awareness of challenges faced by Dalit lawyers;
2. Increased capacity of Dalit lawyers to identify linkages between caste-based and religious discrimination;
3. Strengthened Dalit lawyer networks to fight caste-based discrimination and religious freedom; and

³ <https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/06/27/the-american-lawyers-national-pro-bono-rankings/>

4. Creation of a central knowledge hub that provides technical support, a common platform for collaboration, mentoring and sharing of ideas, first-hand project management and monitoring instruments and toolkits, along with evaluation and advocacy strategies.

Ultimately, this is a grassroots initiative which we hope will lead to greater religious freedom for Dalit and tribal communities.