

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Aug 12, 2020

**"Combat Caste Discrimination in your firm" Alliance Against Caste Tells CEOs
Testimonials Collected by Coalition Point to Widespread Caste Discrimination
Across the US**

The Indian American Alliance Against Caste (IAAAC) today urged the CEOs of the 25 US high-tech companies to combat caste based discrimination in their firms immediately. The letter draws their attention to a landmark case on caste discrimination filed on June 30, 2020 by the California Fair Housing and Employment office against the tech giant Cisco. That case highlights the discriminatory practices of two dominant caste Cisco employees against another Cisco employee who belongs to the Dalit (formerly 'Untouchable') community. According to the letter: "Caste based discrimination has long been an unacknowledged problem in Silicon Valley and the US. The Cisco case names it and asks all of us to take it seriously. Caste discrimination is as toxic as race and gender-related discriminations. Neglecting caste is tantamount to allowing your company to be a hostile workplace."

The letter demands that CEOs intervene immediately to institute policies to combat caste based discrimination alongside similar policies on race, gender and sexuality in their firms, to integrate caste into their diversity and inclusion programs, and to review recruitment policies to eliminate bias. The letter notes that "the Indian high-tech workforce...is overwhelmingly composed of 'dominant caste groups' who enjoy a 'traditional' social power and status over other caste groups. What this means is that every tech company is potentially a Cisco in terms of active caste discrimination at your workplaces." Speaking on the occasion of the release of the letter to the CEOs, Prof. Subramanian of Harvard University pointed out that "the prevalence of caste discrimination in both elite technical education and private industry in India makes its entry into the American workplace not the least bit surprising." Prof. Brown (Indiana University) argued that the Cisco case highlights the absolute "importance of integrating the issue of caste discrimination into every level of policy in the United States."

IAAAC is a coalition of the most prominent community-based organizations representing Dalits in the USA and other social justice organizations from the Indian diaspora. "We aim to transform the American workplace into a safer and more productive space through this campaign" said a spokesperson for the coalition and Ambedkar International Mission USA (AIM USA), an IAAAC member. Mr. Selvaraj, Speaking on behalf of the Ambedkar King Study Circle, a Silicon Valley based Dalit community organization, noted that "As per the testimonials that we are receiving, casteism is widespread within the Indian community in US. It is time that our employers take note of this since it negatively impacts workplace morale, trust and synergy." Dr. Yengde, of Harvard University commenting on the launch of the campaign said, "Caste is always one of the last things that is acknowledged. Many Indians of the dominant caste lot are ready to support social justice issues around racism, homophobia, but do not acknowledge the casteism in our midst for which they are responsible. 'Indians for BLM' is their barter to 'Indians against Casteism'. We are determined to have American companies do the right thing." The coalition is hopeful that the progressive leadership of the tech industry will respond positively and quickly to its demands.

<email sent to the CEO given below>

The below email is sent to 25 companies and the list is at the bottom of this doc.

To <Company Name / CEO & HR>

We are writing today regarding the problem of caste-based discrimination in workplaces in the United States. As your company employs a high-tech workforce, with a large percentage of workers of Indian origin, this issue is relevant to you.

On June 30, 2020, the California Fair Housing and Employment office filed a case against Cisco in the federal court in San Jose. This landmark case, filed on behalf of an employee of Cisco, charges his immediate supervisors with discrimination allegedly against him on the basis of his caste. The employee and supervisors are all of Indian origin - the former belonging to the Dalit community, considered to be lowest in the caste hierarchy, and the two supervisors belonging to castes accorded a higher status. This demonstrates the spread to the US workplace of the Indian caste system, whose graded hierarchy of caste ranges from Brahmins at the top to Dalits, formerly called untouchable, at the bottom.

A synopsis of the case and the larger context of discrimination at the workplace against Dalits is available in the *Los Angeles Times* ([California sues Cisco alleging discrimination based on India's caste system](#)) and other [media reports](#) on the issue. [Online discussions](#) that followed the lawsuit demonstrate the practice of caste among the Hindus in daily life. [The testimonies](#) that we have collected bear out such practices in the USA.

Under the leadership of the Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), a community organization based in California working on issues of social justice for Dalits, we have documented caste-based discrimination which has long been an unacknowledged problem in the US. In Silicon Valley, or in any company with a significant workforce from India, some form of active caste discrimination may allow staff from dominant castes to exercise unfair privilege over those from non-dominant castes.

Caste discrimination is as toxic and harmful as are race and gender-related discriminations. Neglecting it is tantamount to allowing your company to be a hostile workplace.

We, the Indian American Alliance Against Caste, comprising 8 anti-caste / social justice community organizations, urge your company to do the following:

1. Include "protection from caste-based discrimination" in the workplace harassment policy.
2. Name caste as a factor in your bias training, and in diversity, inclusion and recruitment efforts.

To aid you with this effort, our coalition has put together [a team of scholar-experts and community-based educators on caste](#).

Like other forms of diversity, caste-based diversity contributes to a healthy work environment that is free from discrimination and exclusion, draws from a larger talent pool, generates synergies, and improves performance. (See McKinsey Reports ([Why Diversity Matters](#) and [Diversity Wins: Why Inclusion Matters](#))).

We trust that your organization will take caste-based discrimination seriously, and be pro-active in combating it.

Attachments: 1/ Signed solidarity statement.

Regards,

Ambedkar Association of North America, USA.
Ambedkar International Mission, USA.
Ambedkar King Study Circle, USA.
Association for India's Development, USA.
Boston Coalition, USA.
Coalition of Seattle of Indian-Americans, USA.
Global Indians Progressive Alliance, USA.
India Civil Watch International, USA.

email is sent to 25 companies

1. Mr.Tim Cook, The Chief Executive Officer of Apple.
2. Mr.Satya Nadella, The Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft.
3. Mr.Young Hoon (YH) Eom, The President and The Chief Executive Officer of Samsung.
4. Mr.Sundar Pichai, The Chief Executive Officer of CAphabet Inc. and Google LLC.
5. Mr.John Stankey, The Chief Executive Officer of AT&T.
6. Mr.Jeff Bezos, The Chief Executive Officer of Amazon.
7. Mr.Hans Vestberg, The Chief Executive Officer of Verizon Communications.
8. Mr.Nick Jeffery, The Chief Executive Officer of Vodafone Group.
9. Mr.Sigve Brekke, The Chief Executive Officer of Telenor.
10. Mr.Jensen Huang, The Chief Executive Officer of NVIDIA.
11. Mr.Brian Humphries, The Chief Executive Officer of Cognizant.
12. Mr.Reed Hastings, The Chief Executive Officer of Netflix.
13. Mr.Antonio Neri, The Chief Executive Officer of Hewlett Packard Enterprise.
14. Mr. Daniel H. Schulman, The Chief Executive Officer of PayPal.
15. Mr.Steve Mollenkopf, The Chief Executive Officer of Qualcomm.
16. Mr.Hock E.Tan, The Chief Executive Officer of Broadcom Inc.
17. Ms.Julie Sweet, The Chief Executive Officer of Accenture.
18. Mr.Michael Dell, The Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Dell Technologies.
19. Ms.Susan Miller, Head of Global Public Relations at SAP.
20. Mr.Safra Catz, The Chief Executive Officer of Oracle.
21. Mr.Chuck Robbins, The Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Cisco Systems.
22. Mr.Arvind Krishna, The Chief Executive Officer of IBM.
23. Mr.Bob Swan, The Chief Executive Officer of Intel.
24. Mr.Mark Zuckerberg, The Chief Executive Officer of Facebook.
25. Mr.Robert.Chapek, The Chief Executive Officer of Walt Disney Broadcasting & Cable.