



## Newsletter – Highlights of 2021

Advocating Rights in South Asia

This is the first newsletter of 2022. We have selected eight highlights (in random order) that describe Arisa's year of 2021 best.

In this newsletter, we celebrate the accomplishments and achievements of the past year. Big and small. But we don't look back without looking forward. With much motivation and determination, we will continue our work to protect human rights in production chains in South Asia.

- Team Arisa -

### In this newsletter

- Our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Three reports and three sessions  
The Covid pandemic: how it affected Arisa's work
- Fundraiser: support for Indian partners of Arisa
- Legislation and due diligence
- TruStone in Verona
- And more...

---

### 1. Arisa's 40 Year anniversary

2021 was the year in which Arisa celebrated its 40th anniversary. For 40 years, Arisa has been working with partners in India to address human rights violations. A great milestone!

Throughout last year, we celebrated our anniversary in several ways. We hosted an **online event** in October during which the previous CEO of the India Committee of the Netherlands (the former name of Arisa) for 35 years, Gerard Oonk, looked back on 40 years of activities, discussions, and decision making at the ICN. He looked also forward to the challenges Arisa faces today. The second lecturer,

Namit Agarwal of the World Benchmarking Alliance, sketched the developments in India of the past 40 years and the challenges for the future.

An anniversary is not complete without a (modest) party, which took place two days after our online event. Among the guests were (ex-)employees, (ex-)board members, (ex-)volunteers, and other close relations of ICN/Arisa. A highlight at the party: former CEO Gerard Oonk received a Royal distinction from Sharon Dijksma, the mayor of Utrecht.

Another way in which we celebrated our 40th anniversary was with you! You shared your stories and memories of Arisa with us, which we shared in our newsletters. **Thank you again** for sending us your inspiring stories.

---

## 2. Three reports and their multitude of outcomes

2021 was the year of three published reports: *'Spinning Around Workers' Rights'*, *'Leather products from India – Trends in production and trade'*, and *'Seeds of Oppression'*.

These reports on their own aren't our highlight. What they achieved and enabled us to do is. The reports *'Trends in production and trade: Leather products from India'* and *'Seeds of Oppression'* were discussed with many stakeholders. We used all three reports to **start the conversation** with policymakers and politicians in the Netherlands. They have been great tools for us to **advocate workers' rights** in South Asia from the Netherlands. These three reports shine a light on issues that are often unknown or stay in the background.

---

## 3. Three sessions and a wave of engagement

2021 was the year of three successful sessions with and for our partners.

The topic of the first session, which took place on the 25th of February, was **caste discrimination in the clothing sector**. We organised this session together with the Rights Education and Development Centre (READ), International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), and Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). The workshop attracted more than 40 participating companies and other stakeholders and people interested and involved in this topic.

The second session took place on the 9th of September 2021 and was organised by Arisa, the TruStone secretariat, and READ. This was a webinar for the members of the TruStone Initiative. The topic of this webinar was **the role of discrimination in the natural stone sector**. During the webinar, we discussed the daily reality for Dalits and what companies can do to recognise and handle discrimination on the work floor based on sex, religion, caste, ethnicity, or background. The 30 participants of this webinar were very engaged, which made it an interactive and interesting session.

On the 28th of September, Arisa and the Indian organisation ASK India organised a webinar about the clothing industry for 16 local trade unions and NGOs in the region of Delhi (the National Capital Region – NCR). The NCR is one of the **biggest clothing production areas** in India. During the webinar, Arisa and ASK introduced local trade unions and NGOs to the local and international context of the

clothing industry in the NCR and provided them with tools to **address human rights violations on an international level**. This webinar aided in strengthening the civil society in this region for a more responsible clothing industry in NCR.

---

#### 4. The global pandemic: how it affected Arisa's work and working at Arisa

Like many other people, the Arisa team had to work from home for nearly the whole of 2021. We were unable to travel to the partners and projects in India. Luckily the technology with Zoom enabled us to stay in good contact with each other and with the partners we work with. At times Zoom could even work better than a real meeting because it makes it so much easier for people from all corners of the world to meet up. Needless to say, we all missed the face-to-face meetings, travels, and human interactions. As a team, we did manage to see each other on a regular basis in the office when the COVID rules allowed for it. We also really enjoyed the visit of one of our partners from India to the Netherlands.

Some of the programmes in India have been more affected by the global pandemic: factories were closed training programmes for workers and research projects needed to be postponed. Some of our partners needed to start emergency relief and COVID-19 support activities. Really worrying is the tremendous impact this global pandemic has and will have on children in India, not going to school for long periods of time, without access to online learning tools.

---

#### 5. Support for Indian partners of Arisa / Fundraiser

2021 was the year in which many of you stepped up and helped out people in need. In May 2021, Arisa started a fundraiser to raise money for our Indian partners, who helped workers and their families in India to live through the global pandemic. A total amount of €13.322 was raised. Thank you again for your support. It was a highlight in dark times.

---

#### 6. Support for partners of Arisa: a successful fundraiser

2021 was the year in which many of you stepped up and helped out people in need. In May 2021, Arisa started a fundraiser to raise money for our Indian partners, who helped workers and their families in India to live through the global pandemic. A total amount of €13.322 was raised. Thank you again for your support. It was a highlight in dark times.

---

#### 7. TruStone in Verona

2021 was the year in which two of our Arisa colleagues, Gine Zwart, and Lizette Vosman, visited the yearly natural stone fair Marco+Mac in Verona (Italy) for the first time. Marco+Mac is one of the biggest fairs in this sector in the world. At the fair, Gine and Lizette talked with Italian companies and suppliers of TruStone companies about responsible business conduct and human rights risks in the natural stone sector. They also gave a presentation to the members of the European Natural Stone

Federation about the issues in the natural stone industry and about TruStone. This was a great opportunity to spark people's interest in this sector in TruStone.

---

## 8. Stakeholder dialogues in Rajasthan

For years, Arisa's partners in Rajasthan (India) have been working on a child labour-free zone in Budhpura and on improving working conditions. In 2021 TruStone members, including Arisa, entered into a dialogue with suppliers of TrueStone companies and our partners in Rajasthan. We openly discussed issues about health and safety, a lack of drinking water, and a complaints mechanism during multiple dialogue sessions. These stakeholder dialogue sessions were very fruitful. In 2022, these dialogue sessions will continue. Arisa will keep supporting local organisations and involve local companies to address pressing issues.

---

## 9. Legislation and due diligence

2021 Was the year in which we committed ourselves to the Initiative for Sustainable and Responsible Business Conduct (IDVO). As a part of the coalition of businesses, academics, religious organisations, trade unions, and civil society organisations we advocated for a law in the Netherlands that sets clear rules for businesses and measures for responsible business conduct. Early December 2021, there was good news: Minister de Bruin of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation announced that he would start a national legislative process on this topic.

2021 was also the year in which we worked on strengthening due diligence mechanisms. During a webinar in June, labour unions and NGOs from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal spoke about using the complaint mechanism of the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile (AGT). As a result of this webinar, initiated by Arisa, CNV International, and FNV Mondial, the participating organisations learned from each other how to better to support employees in using the complaint mechanism.

---