

DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK UK

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The statement below was sent by DSNUK on 14 April 2008, Ambedkar Day, to the High Commission of India in London, with copies to the High Commissioner Designate, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and the British High Commission in Delhi.

THE WORST JOB IN THE WORLD

More than 270 million people worldwide continue to experience discrimination based on their caste and practices linked to untouchability. The UK Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN) campaigns against the poverty, atrocities and humiliation caused by the caste system. DSN is part of an international network campaigning for recognition of the problem of caste discrimination and action for its eradication

On the occasion of Ambedkar Day 2008, we are writing to draw your attention to the continued practice of manual scavenging – where people are employed to remove human excrement from dry toilets and sewers using basic tools such as thin boards, buckets and baskets lined with sacking carried on the head. Though this vile and inhumane practice was abolished by law in 1993, it is estimated by the Indian Government that 1.3 million Dalits, mostly women are still employed as manual scavengers across India.

Manual scavenging is the most extreme form of caste discrimination and its complicity in its continued practice is one of the worst human rights scandals in the world today. The Indian Government and state authorities must fulfil their own target to eliminate scavenging by 2009/10.

Safai Karmachari Andolan '*the Liberation Movement of those employed as scavengers*' is an organisation set up by manual scavengers. They have launched an international campaign to demand an end to this practice by the Commonwealth Games, in Delhi October 2010.

DSN is part of this campaign and believes that the Commonwealth Games can not be held in a country in which illegal manual scavenging continues.

We strongly urge:

- the Indian Government and state authorities to fulfil their own targets to eliminate human scavenging by 2009/10 and to undertake an extensive evaluation into how the millions budgeted to rehabilitate manual scavengers has been spent
- international institutions, governments, humanitarian organisations, labour organisations and companies to acknowledge manual scavenging and to step up efforts to eradicate its practice and to support rehabilitation and training programmes for alternative livelihood and sustenance
- the UK government to express its concern on this issue and the lack of progress on legislation intended to eradicate this practice

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss our work and ways in which we can move forward on this issue together.

This statement was sent on 14 April, Ambedkar Day by Solidarity Networks in Europe to their respective High Commissions and Embassies in Europe and India.