

Abolish Untouchability Now
A Call to the Nation
by
Empowerment and Entitlement Coalition
India

The Empowerment and Entitlement Coalition (E&E Coalition) comprises of many Civil Society Groups in India, the Dalit Network of the Netherlands, the International Dalit Solidarity Network and other Civil Society Groups all over the world. Each Group and Organization in the Coalition is involved in different activities in order to build a better India that will provide humanly possible equal and dignified space to all her citizens. This is a call to the nation by concerned citizens of India and not by Dalits alone. E&E Coalition realizes that the multiple forms of the practice of untouchability in India is the worst prevailing social mechanism that forces totally unacceptable subjugation of Dalits in India and denial of human rights in the post-modern period. Therefore, E&E Coalition appeals to all citizens of India to immediately do whatever they can to stop this practice and demands from the Government of India that it sets in motion with immediate effect all law enforcing agencies to stop forthwith the following commonly prevailing practices of untouchability in the country.

1. We recognize that all forms of social, economic cultural and political discrimination across all regions and denial of equal opportunity on the basis of descent and birth for social and economic development by any individual, corporate or public body are manifestations and practices of untouchability. We demand that the Government of India enact adequate and stringent measures and enforce implementation of such measures in order to stop all such discrimination at all levels.
2. We assert that no human sensitivity can accept the employment of people in degrading jobs such as manual scavenging. We note with deep pain and sorrow that even some government agencies are engaged in this most inhuman practice of untouchability. We demand that the Government of India stop forthwith this heinous practice and take strict punitive measures on all those government agencies that have failed to bring such unforgivable culprits to books.
3. The E&E Coalition also brings to the attention of the Government of India the segregation of Dalits as Slum Dwellers in cities and employing them for menial jobs required by the Government Agencies. We recognize as a modern extension of untouchability the phenomenon of singling out Dalits in slums for employment of Dalits for cleaning modern toilets, manual holes, sewerage etc. for wages much

below the minimum wages fixed by the government. We appeal to the Government of India to bring all such modern and sophisticated extension of untouchability practices in urban areas under the purview of constitutional prevention of the practice of untouchability.

4. It is common knowledge in many places of India that shoe making has been forced on Dalits as caste labour. Though we recognize the dignity of labour including shoe making we strongly condemn any human labour dominantly imposed on any people as a caste duty based on birth and descent.
5. It is a common practice all over India to force the Dalits to play Dalit drum as a caste duty at funerals of dominant caste people, festivals, for announcement of information and in other public events. This has deprived the Dalit drums and the Dalit people of the artistic value of music that is attached to Dalit drum. We demand that the caste society in India put an immediate stop to all such enforcement of indignity and appreciate the musical value of Dalit drums. We demand that the Government of India prohibit any direct and indirect enforcement of this free caste labour on Dalits both by Government agencies and by the caste society.
6. We realize with much pain that Dalits are being forced to dig graves for the dead of the caste groups as a free caste labour. E&E Coalition has no hesitation to assert that it is a very serious violation of human rights and dignity of the Dalit community. We demand that the government of India stop this practice of untouchability by the caste society in India.
7. We are appalled that the dominant caste society in all states of India uses terrible force on Dalits for removal of carcasses as a free caste labour. We condemn the total insensitivity of the dominant caste society to such violation of the dignity of citizens in their own country. We also condemn the callousness of the Government of India that has allowed this practice and all such practices to continue unabated even after 60 years of the Constitution that prohibits all such practices of untouchability. The E&E Coalition likes to remind the Government of India that Constitutional governance is the only way to avoid caste conflicts in India and to restore internal peace in the country.
8. We recognize that the denial of entrance into any place of worship on the basis of descent and birth is a practice of untouchability. While this is a violation of the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India we also appeal to the Dalit community to exercise their full freedom to leave all those religions that deny them access to places of worship on the basis of their caste and descent.
9. We appreciate that the Government of India has recognized the inability of its own law enforcement agencies and brought into force the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocity Act of 1989. However, we note with deep sorrow that unmitigated violence and atrocities on Dalits, especially on Dalit women continue till today. The many cases of registered and unregistered cases of rape of Dalit women reported in the Media bear ample evidence to substantiate in sad but true statement of affairs of governance in India and demand that the Government of India make it a top priority

to stop and prevent all torture, degrading treatment or punishment on the basis of descent and birth by any individual or law enforcement agency.

10. We like to state the obvious that many law enforcement agencies are hand gloves with the caste forces and deny legal and human protection to citizens on the basis of descent and birth. We demand that all such individuals and agencies that exhibit such blatant caste loyalty to the detriment of the implementation of the spirit and letter of the Constitution be booked under the Act of 1989 and be punished severely.
11. We recognize the non-implementation of government schemes on the basis of descent and birth as a serious case of untouchability. We stand against all such and similar denial of accessibility to legal and constitutional privileges and rights. We like to remind the Government of India that inadequacy of applications for government schemes is not an adequate ground for taking back the budget allocated for the social and economic development of Dalits in the country.
12. We reaffirm the fact that unequal distribution of land and other resources on the basis of descent and birth is untouchability. Governance is distribution of values, both material and spiritual. Governance in India has kept the Dalits out of the ambience of this distribution of values. We demand that the Government of India rectify with immediate effect its own failure in distribution of resources, especially land, which is the lifeline of Dalits. We demand that the Government of India enact a law to distribute a minimum of five acres of land to each landless Dalit family.
13. We appreciate the sensitivity of the Government of India that has included verbal abuse of Dalits by the caste society under the purview of untouchability and atrocity in the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocity Act of 1989. With the Government of India the E&E Coalition condemns the use of abusive language on people or against people in public and private places on the basis of descent and birth. We like to remind the Government of India that more of this Act has remained in words and less in practice.
14. We recognise and condemn the discrimination that exist in the elected bodies on the basis of descent and birth, such as not allowing Dalits to sit on par with other elected members in official meetings and not allowing them to exercise constitutional rights as elected members.
15. E&E Coalition joins the rest of the world in recognizing education as the biggest window of enlightenment and dignified living. However, it is a sad story that in India education was banned for Dalits for many centuries in the past and now it continues indirectly through discrimination in educational institutions on the basis of descent and birth, such as not allowing Dalit kids to sit with other children, serving mid-day meals in separate plates, calling Dalit children with derogatory nicknames and teachers often marking the Dalit students as untouchables. It is a strong negative statement on constitutional governance in India that even in university hostels Dalit students are forced to sit separately in the dining tables.

16. E&E Coalition calls for the immediate removal of double glass system in all restaurants in the country. While we demand that the government take stringent measures to stop this practice of untouchability we also appeal to all sensible citizens of India not to enter all those restaurants that practice this double glass system.
17. Recognising the denial of burial ground to people based on their descent and birth as untouchability, we call for the immediate provision of decent and adequate burial grounds for such people. We also demand that common burial grounds granted by the government should allow the Dalits to bury their dead in the same grounds.
18. We like to remind the government of India that its profession of the removal of untouchability stands in sharp contrast to the practice of government agencies setting apart housing sites for Dalits in segregated areas exclusively for them. This is a blatant practice of untouchability. We demand that the Government of India, as a mark of its honesty of purpose, allocate housing sites for Dalits and all other caste people without discriminating the Dalits.
19. The E&E Coalition gathers all strength at its disposal to condemn in the severest possible terms the still prevailing practice of Devadasi system that sexually victimizes Dalit women. No sane society can stand such most vicious treatment of women in its own courtyard. We like to remind the Government of India that this one practice is adequate enough to show to the world at large the lack of political will in India to govern the country according to the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India. We hope that good and human sense will prevail on the dominant caste society and on the Government to immediately arrest this injustice on Dalit women and prove to the world that we are a nation worthy of governance.

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