



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ELIMINATION OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

ILO NEWS (Delhi) - A National Conference on Manual Scavenging is being organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in Ahmedabad with the aim of producing concrete suggestions to overcome caste-based employment stigmas and study technological opportunities that can help to eliminate scavenging in India.

Manual scavenging is the removal of excreta by hand. It is a caste-based occupation and the vast majority of workers involved are women. The Government of India has set the goal to totally eradicate manual scavenging by 2012, the end of the current Five-Year Plan.

The exact number of people working as manual scavengers remains disputed, and estimates range from five to more than 10 lakhs. The National Advisory Council (NAC) has recommended a fresh national survey to establish the exact number of scavengers left. The Conference will debate whether and how the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is progressing with this new survey.

The Conference, which takes place from 24 to 25 February 2011, will also discuss the relevance and practical application of newly proposed legislation, mandated by the NAC, which will expand the definition of manual scavenging to contract workers in sewage and septic tanks. The Bill is being prepared by a Task Force on Sanitation and Leather Workers that was set up by the Ministry of Labour and Employment with the aim of improving the working conditions of manual scavengers.

In addition, the Conference will review the implementation of some welfare schemes set up by governmental institutions to facilitate the eradication of manual scavenging and help manual scavengers find alternative work. Participants will also look at ways to make these schemes more effective.

Participants at the Conference will include a broad spectrum of agencies involved in the elimination of manual scavenging, including Government representatives, trade unions, academia, judges, and representatives from the manual scavenging community.

The involvement of the ILO in the manual scavenging sector came following comments made by trade unions to the ILO's supervisory bodies on India's application of the ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111). The ILO has now been in consultations with a wide range of partners to discuss the way forward. Information has also been gathered from the manual scavenging community itself, in three "zonal consultative meetings" held in Lucknow, Jaipur and Ahmedabad in 2011, covering five States.

The Conference will be hosted by the India Institute of Management in Ahmedabad and held at its campus. This environment of high learning will inspire participants to produce the best possible options contributing to the elimination of manual scavenging in India.

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