

PRESS RELEASE

WHO WILL LISTEN TO OUR PLIGHT AND PAIN?

1. My name is Bhagwati Jerambhai Parmar. I live in Paliyad village in Botad taluka of Bhavnagar district. I am 13 years old. I live with my mother. My father was suffering from kidney stone and he went through medical treatment but did not survive. I left going to school from year 2004 and I have passed 3rd grade. After leaving my school, I used to go with my father to dump the garbage in the village panchayat. I go to clean and sweep when someone calls me. I go to do cleaning work in Darbargadh for 2 to 3 times in a month. I go alone to get leftover food. I also drag dead dogs and for that I get 5 Rupees. There is lot of money problems in my house so I go with other girls to pick plastics and I get 5 to 15 rupees which I use to buy milk for our tea. After the death of my father, my brother has joined in the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in Rakhial area. He works as man-hole worker. I am sad about it because I know many people die in the man-hole. Despite that to fill up our stomachs, to do begar we have sent our brother.



1. My name is Gautam Govinbhai Dodiya. I live at Dhoda junction in Umrata taluka of Bhavnagar district. I am 15 years old. I live with my mother. My father died because he was an alcoholic. I have stopped going to the school because I was asked to clean urinals and toilets in the school. I left school after 5th grade in the year 2005. Once a month I go to clean septic tank and I get 200 rupees. In case someone calls me to do cleaning then in return I get 10 to 15 rupees. Occasionally I go to get leftover food during marriage occasions. I get 15 to 20 rupees to drag a dead dog. I also collect plastic and waste everyday and I get 5 to 10 rupees by selling it.



2. My name is Bharatkumar Chandubhai Harijan. I live in Aslali village in Matar taluka of Kheda district. I am 13 years old. I live with my parents. I study in the government school in my village. The children from Thakore and Bharwad caste practice untouchability with us in the classroom. Once a week I clean one classroom in my school. Once a week I also clean the urinals in my school. Every night I go with my grandmother to get leftover food in my village. Sometimes I go to drag a dead cat or dog and in return I get 5 rupees or 1 kilo Bajri or wheat.



3. My name is Gautamkumar Ratilal Valmiki. I am 13 years old. I am living in Harij town of Patan District. Right now I am studying in Standard 8th. We the valmiki community students face discrimination during the mid-day meals in our school. The other community students also abuse us on the basis of our caste. These students belong to Prajapati and Thakore community. I also do the cleaning work of my school class room everyday. I also go in the Ambika nagar area twice or thrice in a week in place of my father who is employed by Harij Municipal Corporation to do sanitation work. My father is drawing Rs. 1500/- as monthly Salary. Every day I also go to Ambikanagar area to collect leftover food. If we drag a dead dog or cat we are given Rs. 8/- or 10.



4. My name is Shailesh Batukbhai Vegad. I live alone in Vallabhipur city in Vallabhipur taluka of Bhavnagar district. I am 14 years old. My mother was suffering from cancer and father committed suicide by hanging. I failed again and again so I left my school from 7th standard in year 2008. I go for private cleaning work 8 to 10 times in a month. I get 50-60 rupees/day. I do not go to beg leftover food, but I eat anywhere in Valmiki vas. I drag dead dogs and cats and for that I get 50 to 60



Rupees. I have no parents so I feel lonely. I have no support from anybody.

5. My name is Umesh Bharatbhai Vegad. I live with my Parents in Vallabhipur city in Vallabhipur taluka of Bhavnagar district. I am 13 years old. I study in 8th standard. We are seated on the floor in school and other caste children sit on the bench. Teachers and children from Patel and Darbar caste keep discrimination with us. I clean my class twice in a month. I clean toilet and urinal every Saturday.



These are glimpses in to the lives of children from the manual scavenging community. Manual scavenging is one of the most obnoxious practices existing since the origin of the caste system in India. It is a forced caste based occupation where more than 1.3 million people in India are affected by this practice.

Despite constitution and legal mechanisms, manual scavenging and related caste based occupations exists in crudest forms in the rural and well as urban areas across India.

Navsarjan is a state level human rights organization existing for past 20 years in Gujarat. Navsarjan took up this issue in the state of Gujarat from one village called Ranpur in Ahmedabad district and made it a state level campaign filing petition in the High Court of Gujarat as well as in the Supreme Court of India.

Since year 2003, Navsarjan has been working on the issues of discrimination against Dalit children both in the government schools and in private spheres. While involved in this program, we have found that the Dalit children and mainly the scavenger community children who are called as Valmikis are forced to do menial work like cleaning class rooms, toilets and urinals in the school where they go to study. They are also discriminated by the school teachers and children from other castes which results in to high drop out of these children from the schools at a very young age. They also are involved in doing other caste based occupations like dragging or pulling of dead dogs, cats and pigs in return of 5 to 10 rupees. They also do collection of scrap, waste paper and rag picking. They go with their parents to get left over food in the village. They beat drums, etc.

Navsarjan' s organizes protest day against the manual scavenging practice in Gujarat every year and this year on 17th August 2009 1000 children both girls and boys from the valmiki community will be speaking about their plight and pain of being born in the lowest caste. These children would be coming from 43 talukas i.e. blocks covering 13 Districts of Gujarat. A document highlighting the voices of these children would be also released.

You having held a very important position and having the sensitivity on the issues of human rights, it would be our honor if you can make it possible to attend this very important event as the chief jury member of this program.

The venue of the event would be Gandhi Ashram, Ahmedabad. The program would be held from 12 noon to 4 pm. At 12 pm the rally would start from Vadaj Bus stand and then would proceed to the Gandhi Ashram. The voices of the children would be heard after 1 pm.

The program will end with remarks from the jury members:

1. Justice R.A. Mehta- Former Acting Chief Justice of Gujarat.
2. Ms. Kamlaben Gurjar - Honorable member of National Commission for Safai Karmacharies.
3. Shri. Ishwarbhai Patel - Former member of National Commission for Safai Karmacharies.
4. Shri Martin Macwan - Founder of Navsarjan and renowned Dalit leader.
5. Ms. Mari Thekakara - Writer and journalist.
6. Prof. Ghanshyam Shah – Political Scientist