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THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM**IMADR Oral Statement: 21st Session of the Human Rights Council****Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation**

12 September, 2012

Thank you Madame President,

We welcome the thematic report of Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation ([A/HRC/21/42](#)), especially the distinct characterization of “untouchability” and caste discrimination as a root cause of stigma and social segregation of Dalits. The interlinkage of these issues are also documented in our written statement to this Council.

Based on the notion of “pollution” and “impurity”, Dalits of South Asia are often restricted in their access to safe drinking water and sanitation. A study conducted in 2006 found that in India more than 20% of Dalits did not have access to safe drinking water, and 48.4% of Dalit villages were denied access to a water source.¹ Water has been a medium of exclusion and segregation for those who are considered to be “untouchable” to the rest of society. Dalit women and girls are responsible for bringing water to the household, and are therefore among the most exposed to discrimination and sometimes violent reprisals when fetching water at public water taps.

We also would like to highlight the degrading practice of “manual scavenging” where the issue of sanitation is interlinked with stigma, untouchability and caste discrimination. This caste-based occupation is the job of removing human excrement from dry toilets and sewers with bare hands, and it is believed to include more than 1 mio workers in India although the exact number remains disputed. Although banned in India, it is still very much prevalent – also in other South Asian countries. A new Indian law, which introduces tough penalties for those who employ manual scavengers, was proposed in the Indian Parliament last week, and is hoped to be adopted and implemented with no further delay.² When enacted, we request the Special Rapporteur to help monitoring the implementation of this law and similar laws in other countries.

Moreover, as evidenced in both Pakistan and India, Dalits have been denied access to water and sanitation in the course of humanitarian disaster. In relief camps, Dalits are often excluded from getting aid supplies, because they are distributed following caste criterion. We therefore want to ask the Special Rapporteur to promote the need for practical guidelines to address this matter in disaster management by governments and aid agencies.

Finally, we want to request the Special Rapporteur to make use of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the effective elimination of discrimination based on work and descent in her work whenever this cross-cutting issue is at stake and also to consider any possibility of joint initiatives with other thematic mandate holders to address it.

Thank you Madame President.

¹ 'Untouchability in Rural India' by Ghanshyam Saha, Satish Deshpande, Sukhadeo Thorat, Harsh Mander, and Amita Baviskar Delhi, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2006.

² [The Hindu, Aug 24 2012: “Now, 5-year jail for using manual scavengers”](#)