THE
ENDHUMANTRAFFICKING
SURVIVORS
MANIFESTO

#ENDHUMANTRAFFICKING
“We can't go back and change the beginning, but we can start from where we are and change the ending - support us to change the ending..."
SURVIVORS OF TRAFFICKING, EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE WANT THIS MENACE TO STOP.

HERE’S HOW

5 years ago, twenty of us – who had all suffered trafficking and sexual exploitation in our lives – came together with an intent to fight trafficking and sexual exploitation in our country. We were all in our late teens, but life had exposed us to poverty and then to a market place where we were the products for sale and consumption. We were sold for our sex but we had survived it. While we had escaped that bazaar of sexual violence against girls, we then had to face imprisonment in shelter homes and when we returned back home finally, we were left to fend stigma of having been a prostitute, the emotional and physical scars of sexual exploitation and fears of rejection and homelessness. We were rendered orphans not only by our communities and society, but by our governments as well. That was when we came together to fight. And this, in 2019, is one more step of our fight.

We appeal to all political parties, aspiring Prime Ministers and all political leaders, that enough is enough! It’s not that sexual violence is contained only in market places like brothels. It has spilled everywhere – in homes and streets, in schools and playgrounds, in real life and on our cell phones and computers. It’s not that people are trafficked only for prostitution, they are being trafficked and exploited in brick kilns, construction work, factories and sweatshops and even homes of richer people to provide cheap and exploitative labour.

We appeal to you, to commit to stopping trafficking in India, and sexual violence of children and women and men. And this is what we demand of you, and this is what we, #Utthan commit to.
WE DEMAND
Take us seriously

We still don’t have a law on trafficking. We have many laws ITPA, Bonded Labour Act, child labour laws, but we don’t have a law on trafficking that is able to ensure deterrence by convicting traffickers. At the village level, we have no protection for people who want to migrate safely, there are no services. Most of us are landless, and we have no protection from exploitation. We are not heard by Panchayats and BDOs, and most of us cannot reach anyone higher up. We, the vulnerable youth of this country, need to be taken seriously. We appeal to you to create a comprehensive law on human trafficking that ensures justice to survivors like us, provide budgets for AHTUs across the country and create a robust monitoring system to check corruption and delays in justice delivery. Please include us in monitoring committees. We would like to support in building of this system.

Take a stance on combating trafficking

Sex workers, like us, are often the worst victims of poverty, debt bondage and often the only earning members of their families with not many options, and stigma. Our anti-trafficking law should not persecute those women who are in sex work. It should not force them into shelter homes and rehabilitation centres. The law should empower them to fight brothel managers and madams who exploit them or customers who torture them. Do not mix up madams, brothel managers with sex workers. Protection of sex workers should not be used by brothel managers, pimps and traffickers to block anti-trafficking legislations and policies. Trafficking is not about sex work, it is about being enslaved and forced labour. We need a separate policy and legislation on prostitution. Please commit to taking a stance on combating trafficking. Please commit to strengthening designs and implementation of schemes like MuktiAlo in West Bengal and Prabhat in Goa, which were well intentioned but suffered poor implementation.

Punish people who prostitute children

Despite the POSCO being a powerful and unambiguous legislation that criminalises sex offenders who sexually exploit children, ‘customers’ who buy sexually exploit children are not prosecuted by the police across the country. We urge you to commit to prosecuting all sex offenders who prostitute children and make it mandatory for police officers to investigate and prosecute customers of child prostitution. We would also like to emphasise again that it is the State that needs to protect victims and whistle-blowers and take appropriate action against perpetrators.
Proper implementation of the victim compensation laws

Despite the victim compensation laws being in place for over a decade, we—and other survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation were never told about how to apply for the compensation, we never received help from a lawyer who could help us to apply for the compensation. NGOs who kept us in shelter homes did not inform or help us, neither did the police officers who rescued us, nor did the public prosecutor who called us to provide witness in the trial. For those of us who got to know about it later and applied and received compensation, it was helpful for our rehabilitation, we felt that the government cares for us too. We want you to make rules for NGOs and departments to assist all survivors of sexual trafficking and labour trafficking to apply for compensations and help us receive the financial compensation that helps us in rehabilitation and compensates us for the violence we have endured.

Make shelter homes open, and not prisons

In the name of protection, it has become a business for NGOs to run shelters. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act provides for one to three years of institutionalisation, and while the law does not say anything about forcible detention, in practice NGO and government run shelter homes are nothing but prisons. The services in these shelters do not help in our employability, they don't help us in getting jobs. The counseling provided is not effective in reducing our trauma, our trauma is further increased by endless stays in these shelters where we do not know when we can leave. Even those of us who were adults, are detained in these shelters. Whom does it benefit? NGOs—who get funded for these shelters. We urge you to bring laws for NGOs running shelters so that we are not imprisoned in the name of protection, we are not treated as cattle, we need more accountability from NGOs and governments responsible for our rehabilitation. We need support in livelihood, fighting stigma and in protection from traffickers who threaten us not to press charges against them.

Help people migrate safely, so that they don’t get trafficked

Most of us got trafficked because we wanted to migrate, for a job, for opportunities, to escape poverty and lack of security in our villages or wherever we were staying. We had no one to help us and traffickers took advantage of that. We think if the government was to provide services to help people migrate, link them with job opportunities in other places and not only rely on NREGA which is unpredictable in nature, high on labour and low on income, people would not be trafficked. Particularly, women and adolescents. Many of the skill building opportunities don’t exist in our villages, we need to go to cities to learn skills and vocations. Please consider migration as an anti poverty service, and in the name of prevention of trafficking, don’t force us to stay in poverty and deprivation.
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Laws need to help survivors hold dutybearers accountable

Almost all of us have faced discrimination, stigma and plain refusal of services from dutybearers who are responsible to provide us with services for justice and rehabilitation. The present laws don’t give us any avenues of holding them accountable – if we try to lodge complaints, we often have to bear the brunt of their anger and wrath. Many survivors are often silenced from this fear of backlash. We need guidelines and policies in place across administrative levels that can help us hold dutybearers accountable, while maintaining our safety. We think ensuring channels of lodging complaints against dutybearers who willfully neglect, or actively harms survivors’ right to justice and rehabilitation that doesn’t expose the identity of the survivor will help in this.

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Educate boys on gender and sexuality

Given the growing incidence of elopement of adolescents for marriage, the growth in sexual crimes by adolescent boys, the high demand amongst young men for pornography and prostitution and, in our experience, the growing incidence of adolescent boys and young men trafficking girls (using love and romance as baits), it is important to educate boys on gender, sexuality, health, law and consequences of gender based crimes (sexual harassment, abuse, violence and trafficking). This education not only needs to be part of formal school curriculum but also use social communication campaigns by the governments using all forms of media. Without a political commitment in your manifesto, this may never happen and it will never get the due importance and priority it deserves.

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Help the transgender people with services

Transgender persons and Hijras suffer abuse and exploitation. In the last 5 years, some states have formed trans-gender welfare boards to create opportunities for them following the Supreme Court judgment for protection and rehabilitation of trans-persons. We urge you to commit creating opportunities and protection services for transgendered people in our country, including Hijras to address their trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation.
WE COMMIT
Being good and kind listeners to others

We commit to being respectful and careful in how we treat our community and to speak up when it is safe to do so. Kindness is a responsibility that begins with each of us.

Reporting violence

We commit to breaking taboos and the victimization around reporting violence. We will seek out trusted authorities such as teachers, parents, social workers, counsellors, community representatives and other survivors and young people, when we witness or learn of violence in and around our communities. We also commit to creating survivors- led/ youth-led channels for reporting violence.

Taking action

We commit to start and support initiatives to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation across the country in partnerships with NGOs, governments and the public. We will continue to fight ensure that the rights and dignity of victims are front and centre. We will protect each other and have each other’s backs.