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INDIA Being Untouchable – CSW announces speakers for photography exhibition private viewings

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is pleased to welcome two highly-regarded campaigners against casteism who bring unique experience of using the arts as a vehicle of protest against caste, Meena Kandasamy and S. Anand, as special guests at two private viewings of *Being Untouchable*, a groundbreaking new photography exhibition by Marcus Perkins.

The exhibition presents a rare and intimate series of portraits of the lives of Indian Dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”). *Being Untouchable* will be open for public view from 18-23 October at HOST Gallery, London.

Meena Kandasamy is a poet, writer, activist and translator. She sees each of these as a way of engaging with her identity as a woman, a Dalit and a Tamil, three categories of belonging with a history of resistance to oppression. Meena was the youngest person ever to represent India as a writer-in-residence at the University of Iowa’s International Writing Program 2009. Her debut poetry collection, *Touch*, was published in 2006 to widespread critical acclaim. A second collection, *Ms. Militancy*, will be published later this year. Previously, she edited *The Dalit*, a bi-monthly English magazine. She holds a PhD in socio-linguistics and teaches English at Anna University, Chennai.

S. Anand is an award-winning publisher and journalist who runs the imprint Navayana, the only publishing house in India that focuses exclusively on caste from an anti-caste perspective. In 2007, he won the International Young Publisher of the Year award, instituted by the London Book Fair and British Council. He is the co-author of the first ever graphic biography of the Dalit civil rights champion and architect of India’s constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, entitled *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* (forthcoming). He was previously a print journalist for ten years, and continues to write for some of India’s foremost publications.

Meena said of *Being Untouchable*, “These photographs mirror the India without make-up, a caste-ridden India whose existence is considered an eyesore, a reality which people are afraid to admit. These stark images bring out the truth that Dalits are not only at the bottom of the Indian caste order, but also that this vulnerability has led to their becoming the worst victims of violence. Art here takes on the task of speaking for the disempowered Dalits who have been rendered voiceless by those who ostracize and stigmatize them.”

Anand said of *Being Untouchable*, “Marcus Perkins’ camera captures the dilemmas of Dalits in their quest for dignity. Very rarely do we see persons in these photographs meeting the eye of the camera. When they do, they seem to have something to hide. Perkins manages to bring out the humanness of his subjects despite the bleak lives they are forced to lead. *Being Untouchable* tells us how for one-fifth of India’s population to be human is to be part of an insurrection.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Meena Kandasamy and S. Anand will address the press viewing on 18 October and will also be available for interview. Contact the press office for details.
2. Visit <http://www.csw.org.uk/events> for more information.
3. Marcus Perkins (<http://www.marcusperkins.co.uk>) has covered documentary, corporate and commercial photography assignments in over 90 countries, and is best known for his work on humanitarian and human rights issues.
4. For more information on Meena Kandasamy, visit meenu.wordpress.com.
5. For more information on S. Anand and Navayana publishing, visit navayana.org.
6. HOST Gallery (<http://www.foto8.com/new/on-display/host-exhibitions>) is at 1-5 Honduras Street, London EC1Y 0TH, near Barbican, Moorgate and Old Street tube stations. It is open 10am-6pm Monday to Friday, and 11am-4pm Saturday.