

No, some groups, such as the Roma in Europe or Dalits and scheduled castes in India, have suffered such long-term discrimination in our societies that they need special measures to enable them to access general human rights standards on an equal basis with others. Years of institutionalized discrimination and stereotypes, and outright hatred and obstacles, mean that just announcing generally applicable rights to them, and expecting that this is enough to ensure equality, would be farcical.

#### **7. Why do we talk about human rights and not human responsibilities?**

Although some thinkers and NGOs have put forward strong arguments for the need for human responsibilities and even codes or declaration to articulate these, the human rights community has generally been reticent about this debate. The reason is that many governments make the "granting" of human rights dependent on certain "duties" imposed by the state or ruler, in this way making the whole idea of rights as birthrights meaningless. However, it goes without saying that we need to act responsibly as individuals and groups to respect the rights of others, not to abuse human rights and to advance the rights of others as well as ourselves. In fact, article 29 of the UDHR recognizes that, "1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. 2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society."

#### **8. Who looks after human rights?**

We all need to. There is legislation both at national and at international levels which imposes restrictions on what governments are able to do to their citizens but, if no-one points out that their actions are violating international norms, governments can continue to violate them with impunity. As individuals, we need not only to respect the rights of others in our everyday lives but also to keep watch on our governments and on others. The protective systems are there for all of us if we use them.

#### **9. How can I defend my rights?**

Try pointing out that they have been violated; claim your rights. Let the other person know that you know they are not entitled to treat you in this way.. Pinpoint the relevant articles in the UDHR, in the ECHR or the other international documents. If there is legislation in your own country, point to that as well. Tell others about it: tell the press, write to your parliamentary representative and head of state, inform any NGOs that are engaged in human rights activism. Ask their advice. Speak to a lawyer, if you have the opportunity. Make sure that your government knows what action you are taking. Make them realize that you are not going to give up. Show them the support you can draw on. In the final analysis, and if everything else has failed, you may want to resort to the courts.

#### **10. From whom can I claim my rights?**

Nearly all the basic human rights that are listed in the international documents are claims against your government, or state officials. Human rights protect your interests against the state, so you need to claim them from the state or from their representatives. If you feel that your rights are