

Rotarian Action Group against Child Slavery

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Website www.racsrag.org

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"If murder is the most serious of crimes, slavery follows close on its heels. Slavery is kidnapping and torture and theft and assault and often rape all rolled into one"

(Kevin Bales)



Pope Francis - Conference on Human Trafficking

Pope Francis has called a Conference to discuss an "Action Plan" against human trafficking and modern slavery. The Conference will be held in the Vatican on 2nd and 3rd of November 2013.

Two pontifical academies and a federation of Catholic medical workers will take part in the meeting.

Pope Francis has already referred to the issue several times, railing against particular aspects of the problem like forced domestic work, prostitution, and child labour. In an Easter message shortly after his election earlier this year, Pope Francis said human trafficking was "a despicable activity, a disgrace for our

societies"

In May, the Pope commented that "refugees, displaced and state-less people are particularly vulnerable to the plague of human trafficking, which increasingly involves children subjected to the worst forms of exploitation and even recruitment into armed conflicts."

Qatar's World Cup Slaves

A Guardian Newspaper investigation has found evidence to suggest that thousands of Nepalese, who make up the single largest group of labourers in Qatar, are currently facing exploitation and abuses that amount to modern-day slavery, during a building binge paving the way to the 2022 Soccer World Cup Finals.

According to documents obtained from the Nepalese Embassy in Doha, at least 44 workers, some under 18 years of age, died between 4 June and 8 August. More than half died of heart attacks, heart failure or workplace accidents.

The investigation also reveals:-

- Evidence of forced labour on a significant Soccer World Cup infrastructure project.

- Some Nepalese workers have alleged that they have not been paid for months and have had their salaries retained to stop them running away.

- Some workers on other sites say employers routinely confiscate passports and refuse to issue ID cards, in effect reducing them to the status of illegal aliens.

- Some labourers say they have been denied access to free drinking water in the desert heat.

- About 30 Nepalese sought refuge at their embassy in Doha to escape the brutal conditions of their employment.

The allegations suggest a chain of exploitation leading from poor Nepalese villages to Qatari leaders. The overall picture appears to be one of the richest nations exploiting one of the poorest to get ready for the world's most popular sporting tournament.

"The evidence uncovered by the Guardian is clear proof of the use of systematic forced labour in Qatar," said Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International. He added "In fact, these working conditions and the astonishing number of deaths of vulnerable workers go beyond forced labour to the slavery of old where human beings were treated as objects. There is no longer a risk that the World Cup might be built on forced labour. It is already happening."



The RAG welcomes a new Board member



Board member Dick Eisenach (RC of Phoenix 100) has tendered his resignation from the Board and as RAG Coordinator for the Americas. He has found that his newest venture writing Children's Picture Books has "gathered serious traction to the point where it is demanding the majority of my time". His first book has sold 4,000 copies and has been translated into 3 languages. We are sad to see him go but wish him well in his new career as a writer.

Dick's successor as Board member and RAG Coordinator for the Americas is Dave

McCleary, a Past President of the Rotary Club of Roswell in Georgia (District 6900), USA.

Dave's interest in combating human trafficking started when he volunteered as a "door holder" at the Passion 2012 Conference held in Atlanta. He discovered that trafficking was not restricted to impoverished, third world countries but was also in his own hometown community and other communities across the US. With two teenage daughters of his own, the reality of the issue became real and awareness has led to action.

As President of his Rotary Club, the spark of interest quickly ignited into considering how best Rotary could help to achieve the goal of stopping human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

In his view awareness is the key to getting people involved. Awareness creates knowledge, knowledge is power and power is action to resolve a problem.

We look forward to Dave's contribution to the RAG team's efforts to combat child slavery and human trafficking.

Human Trafficking is a despicable activity, a disgrace for our societies" (Pope Francis)

Editorial

The news that Pope Francis is calling a Conference on Human Trafficking is a real fillip for all anti-slavery activists who have been pressing for more action against the traffickers.

Effective action is imperative because it is highly likely that within a few years, human trafficking will surpass drug trafficking and weapons trafficking as the most lucrative criminal activity in the world.

We will keep our fingers crossed and hope that the Conference will not forget the plight of a far greater number of people (mostly children) who are in slavery, not through the actions of traffickers, but through birth, local custom, debt bondage or religious customs.

According to Professor Kevin Bales, there are approximately 2.5 million people in the world who are in servitude because they have been trafficked into

slavery. This is about 10% of his estimate of the total number of people enslaved around the world, ie 27 million. The rest of the world's slaves are sedentary. They have not been moved from one region or district to another. In most cases they are enslaved by their own people. Only in the industrialized countries and the Middle East have a significant proportion of slaves been trafficked.

India is one of the countries in which children have been traditionally enslaved by their own people.

Last year we reported that the Union Cabinet Government of India was trying to redress the situation and in August 2012, submitted a Bill for approval by the Indian Parliament which would put a blanket ban on employing any child under the age of 14 in any kind of occupation.

Sadly earlier this month, the

Indian Parliament closed its doors on what is being called "the most productive session in years", having passed a landmark number of bills – 11 in total. But one piece of legislation was **once again** left off the agenda, ie the Child and Adolescent Labour Abolition Bill which, if passed, would help end the enslavement of millions of Indian children. This was deferred again in spite of the delivery by Walk Free (an Anti-Slavery Organization) of over 1 million signatures to the Indian Parliament urging them to make the passage of this legislation a priority.

Walk Free has promised to regroup with its partners in India to pressurize the Indian Parliament to reconsider the issue when they resume the session this November. The "winter session" will be the last chance to put this crucial Bill to a vote before the General Election next year.



Combating Carpet Slavery with GoodWeave

by Mark Little

More than one in ten of the world's children toil in the global economy today, and child slavery is especially rampant in the rug and carpet industry, particularly on the Indian Sub Continent. Hundreds of thousands of children - some as young as six years old—are forced to give up their childhoods to make carpets and rugs for our homes and businesses.

RUGMARK...Responding to concern about the violation of children's rights during the 1980s, human rights organizations in Europe and India, along with UNICEF, developed a RugMark programme to provide assurances to consumers that the oriental carpets they were purchasing were made by adults rather than exploited children and to provide for the education and rehabilitation of children found working illegally on looms.

Rugmark was formally launched in India in 1994 and expanded into Nepal in 1996. Thereafter, negotiations with Rugmark programmes in Germany, Nepal, India, and the U.S. resulted in the formal creation of Rugmark International. Rugmark's intent from the outset was based on a very simple premise. If enough people demand certified child-labour-free rugs, manufacturers will only employ skilled, adult artisans and the exploitation of children in the rug industry will come to an end.

GOODWEAVE...in 2009 Rugmark International re-branded the certification programme and introduced the GoodWeave label. Today the international network comprises producing country offices in India and Nepal and consumer country offices in the US, UK and Germany. GoodWeave Germany and GoodWeave UK are currently responsible for licensing throughout Europe while GoodWeave USA is responsible for licensing throughout North America.

GOODWEAVE CERTIFICATION PROCESS....In order to earn the GoodWeave label, (see photo on the right) rug exporters and importers must be licensed under the GoodWeave certification programme and sign a legally binding contract to:

1. Adhere to the no-child-labour [standard](#) and not employ any person under age 14
2. Allow unannounced random inspections by local inspectors
3. Pay a licensing fee that helps support GoodWeave's monitoring, inspections and education programs

To ensure compliance, independent GoodWeave inspectors make unannounced inspections of each loom. If inspectors find children working, they offer them the opportunity to go to school instead, and the producers lose their status with GoodWeave. To protect against counterfeit labelling, each label is numbered so its origin can be traced.

GOODWEAVE PRODUCTS....to find out more about the GoodWeave project and which stores in which countries sell GoodWeave labelled carpets, click on the website which is <http://www.goodweave.org/home.php>. In the [Purchase a Rug section](#) you will find images of member rugs, profiles and searchable directories of member retailers, importers and designers, and links to their individual websites.



A typical rescue operation by Oasis

By Andy Sexton, Associate International Director, Oasis

The SUV drove into the village in the State of Karnataka, India. Its occupants had come from the neighbouring State of Tamil Nadu. They could see it was the right place for their business, as it was obviously a very poor community. They were offered chai as they met with the village leader and told him their mission was to find good workers for the cotton mills in Coimbatore.

The news soon spread throughout the village that outsiders had come offering jobs, and soon a gathering of locals formed around the visitors. The visitors addressed the crowd and told them they were looking for capable children and women who had small, nimble hands, who were willing to work in the cotton mills in Coimbatore. They insisted that their employers treated all their staff well and that they would be paid good wages if they worked hard. They said that they would be taking names, and that as it was Thursday, there would be sufficient time for people to organize themselves to leave on Sunday by bus and car and eventually by train.

For the poor villagers this was a very tempting offer. Many of them had debts they were struggling to pay back to money lenders, others had aspirations, and others were struggling to just meet the needs of their families. One couple had a daughter who should marry but they had no way to pay the dowry. The villagers felt confident that the offer was genuine, as one of the men was a distant relative of a well-known village family, and a woman was among the visitors. They were satisfied that the children would be well treated under her care.

The problem was that these people were traffickers and anyone who was signed up was heading for slavery.

Through an informant in the area, Oasis (head quartered in the state capital Bangalore) was informed about the traffickers' visit. The Oasis rescue team drove out on Saturday to report the case to the District Police Superintendent and ensure police support in the planned rescue. The local police were not informed because it was felt that they were likely to be complicit in trafficking.

On Sunday we drove out very early to the village with the police. The plan was to arrest the traffickers and rescue the children once they had boarded their transport. However, on the way the local informer messaged to say that the traffickers had revised their plans and were now planning to move everyone on the Monday.

On Monday, one Oasis team with the police waited at the Hindupur Station, where the woman and children were to board the Kurla-Coimbatore Express to Coimbatore. A second team positioned themselves near the village to keep us informed of developments. At around 4pm the investigation team at the village reported that the traffickers had changed the plan and were now proposing to take everyone by road all the way to Coimbatore, and would be leaving shortly.

The rescue team were stuck a good hour away from the village and there were now 3 vehicles we had to intercept- a bus and two SUVs. It was now a race against time as they had to be stopped before they crossed the border and out of our jurisdiction. With the police we sped to the Karnataka border. In a very dramatic chase we managed to intercept all three vehicles before they could reach the border. We rescued 81 people, including 31 young girls and boys.

*The photos below show
- one of the three vehicles used by the traffickers intercepted by the police and Oasis activists
- some of the intended victims inside the vehicle. The faces of the two girls at the back have been deliberately blurred to preserve their anonymity*



A typical rescue operation by Oasis (cont'd)

To see news coverage of the rescue follow the link to <http://headlinestoday.intoday.in/programme/police-busts-child-trafficking-racket-in-karnataka-india-today/1/267691.html>

Oasis www.oasisglobal.org began working to free children from slavery in the 1990s when we discovered child prostitutes being forced to work in brothels in Mumbai, India. Since then we have developed anti-trafficking work not only in other locations in India, but also in other countries as well: Bangladesh, Belgium, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, South Africa, and USA. Oasis also started the very successful Stop the Traffik campaign www.stophetraffik.org – instrumental in convincing Cadbury and Nestle to ensure Dairy Milk bars and Kit Kats are trafficking-free.

We are planning to build Academy schools in Uganda and India, in areas where human trafficking is prolific, in order to prevent more children being sold into slavery. Follow this link to see a short video about the Academy and community project in Andra Pradesh, India <http://youtu.be/-gTbnBC7GQY> that has started with a pre-school.

Seven reasons why the RAG exists

1. There is a continual and global increase in the number of children taken into slavery. According to the International Labour Organization, there are 8.4 million children worldwide engaged in what it calls “the worst form of labour”
2. Rotary’s own Code of Policies (Article 8) urges Rotarians to defend the rule of law, to preserve the liberty of all individuals and to uphold the principles of justice for humankind.
3. Many businesses and local economies are based on the use of child slave labour. As most Rotarians are business and professional people, it follows that there is a possibility of Rotarians being involved, either directly or indirectly in this activity. Rotarians need to be reminded, from time to time, about their ethical responsibilities under RI’s Code of Policies, the 4-Way Test and Part 2 of the Object of Rotary.
4. Slavery is contrary to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). All countries have ratified the principles, but many do not enforce them. It is left to anti-slavery organizations to remind, encourage and exhort governments, local authorities, communities and individuals to honour their obligations to protect the human rights of their own citizens. But they need help.
5. Anti-slavery organizations are few in number and have few funds. These organizations therefore need extra support from elsewhere to help them achieve their aims. Rotary International being a global organization is well placed to help in this global problem. Rotarians have already shown that they are a major force in reducing polio worldwide. They can also be hugely influential in helping to eradicate slavery from the face of the globe.
6. The struggle to eradicate child slavery in the polio vulnerable countries is especially important bearing in mind that traffickers and slave holders are not upright and responsible citizens taking all their charges to polio immunization booths or vaccination clinics.
7. The impetus for action comes not only from past Rotary leaders who have urged us to protect all children, but also recently from the leaders of great nations, religious heads and organizations like CNN and Google .

Disclaimer: The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the RACSRAG Board.