

Rotarians against Child Slavery

(A Newsletter for the proposed Rotarian Action Group - See website www.racsrag.org)

Issue No 6

"Slavery is far too big to be stopped by any individual, no matter how powerful, charismatic, or clever that person might be. The end of slavery is within our grasp, but only if we join together to make it so" (Kevin Bales: Ending Slavery)



Swaffham



Application for Rotarian Action Group status ?

In response to a recent question from a member about the future status of our fledgling Action Group and its road to Rotary legitimacy, I had to confess that I did not know the answer.

Some of you may know that last June, the RI Board decided that it would not be considering new applications from prospective Action Groups prior to its January 2010 meeting. This decision has now been superseded by a further moratorium.

Earlier this month, I

received an email from HQ which stated that the RI Board had decided to "develop a new pilot project, which may impact the scope and direction of the Rotarian Action Group program moving forward. Consequently the Board has decided to extend its current moratorium on review of new Rotarian Action Group proposals until its June 2010 meeting. Our tentative deadline for applications to be considered in June 2010 is 19 March 2010. However, please note that as this pilot project

develops, the policies for Rotarian Action Groups may change, as may the requirements for proposed Rotarian Action Group applications and bylaws."

So the situation is very fluid at the moment, but it gives us a little more time to judge how effective we are as an Action Group. It will be interesting to see how this new pilot project develops. I have to admit that the existing regulations are more than a little bit daunting. So any new regulations which make the procedures simpler will be more than welcomed.

Stand at the RI Convention in Montreal

I have now submitted an application for a stand at the next RI Convention to create awareness of the extent of child slavery in our modern world. I will be keeping my fingers crossed that we do not have to pay for the privilege of a stand as we had to do at the last Convention.

Whatever happens I shall

be in Montreal to renew acquaintance with some of you.

At the moment the current membership of the Group is still only 270 members from 27 countries. We do need more members to spread the word about the evils of this modern day practice. So please do try to encourage other Rotarians to join the Group,

via our website.

Today I finalised my travel and accommodation arrangements to visit parts of Canada before the Convention. So if any of my Canadian friends are in the Toronto or Ottawa or Quebec areas between 8th and 17th June please let me know and we can perhaps meet up.

Bal Vikas Ashram, near Allahabad, India

In my last Newsletter I highlighted the various projects which were available for members to participate in. One of them related to a vehicle required by Bal Vikas Ashram, a Child Slave Rehabilitation Centre near Allahabad in India. Is any one/club interested in helping to fund this vehicle which costs US \$18,000 ? I already have \$2,500 dollars set aside from my Club financial resources and from contributions from the Rotary Clubs of Sudbury Talbot and Swaffham in District 1080 in England.

Bal Vikas Ashram was set up by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allahabad in 1999 and is currently headed by Fr Deepak Oswald D'souza. The children who attend the Ashram are children between the ages of 8 years and 14 years who have been rescued from various industries in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. After rescue the children remain in the rehabilitation center for between 6-12 months where they are taught to read and write, to learn about their legal rights as Indian citizens and to acquire trade skills to help them in their future lives. The children are also well cared for by the Sisters of the Congregation of Jesus, but they still need our help. Included below are two photos of the children and staff at Bal Vikas Ashram.



Modern slavery

As I may have mentioned before there is a major difference between "slavery" during the period of the Atlantic Slave Trade and modern slavery. Today slavery exists in many different forms, but each of these forms share two key characteristics that distinguishes them from slavery in the past. Slaves today are **cheap** and they are **disposable**.

A slave purchased in the American Southern States in the 1850's would have cost at today's prices approximately \$40,000 or more; today a slave can be purchased for as little as \$40. Because there is a glut of potential slaves on the open market, they are worth very little. They are like the cheap plastic pens that businesses buy for office use. No one worries about the care and maintenance of these pens, or files title of ownership. Pens are disposable and so are many slaves. Nor will the slaveholder show any compassion over the loss of life either of the slave or of his or her kin.

In Ben Skinner's book "A Crime so Monstrous", he refers to a conversation he had with a quarry slave called Gonoo. There is a paragraph in the book which I would like to share with you.

"Gonoo recalled a hot summer day shortly after Ramesh Garg took over the quarry. A young, unmarried dalit girl had just begun working alongside her parents. In her innocence, she wandered from her work to play with a kitten that had strayed into the quarry to drink from the pool. Gonoo did not notice the girl until he heard the crack of Garg's Mauser rifle. The police never investigated the incident, and her parents never filed charges. That week, the girl's family cremated her small body. Garg paid for the death rites. He then added the cost to the family's debt"

I can't stop thinking about that incident and it has made me even more determined, with the help of other Rotarians, to do something about this monstrous crime.

Mark Little, RC of Norwich St Edmund,
England.

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Action Group's Website: www.racsrag.org