



Bonded Slavery

Bonded slavery is the continual labor of an individual forced to work by mental or physical threat. Bonded slaves are owned by an employer to whom the slave or slave's family is indebted. Bonded slaves are forced to work long hours, often seven days a week, for meager wages, if any, attempting to pay back a debt that increases at exorbitant interest rates. In reality, there is no way to repay the debt and the laborer becomes essentially a slave for life. Many bonded slaves are children who are beaten and abused if they do not fulfill the extreme expectations of the owner.

What are the facts?

- According to the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, an estimated 20 million people were held in bonded slavery as of 1999.
- In 2004 there are more slaves than were seized from Africa during four centuries of trans-Atlantic slave trade. (Kevin Bales, Disposable People)
- In 1850 a slave in the Southern United States cost the equivalent of \$40,000 today. According to Free the Slaves, a slave today costs an average of \$90.
- Approximately two-thirds of today's slaves are in South Asia. Human Rights Watch estimates that in India alone there are as many as 15 million children in bonded slavery.

How does bonded slavery happen?

When a personal or family emergency requires immediate funds the individual or family is forced to work for very little or no pay in exchange for a small loan. Because the debt increases faster than they're paid a slave is trapped without hope of ever paying off the original debt. While IJM does not often find victims in physical chains, the intimidation of powerful oppressors is every bit as effective a means of restraint.

What does IJM do about bonded slavery?

IJM investigates and documents cases of bonded slavery, then works with local law enforcement within the country's legal system to emancipate slaves and bring slaveholders to justice. IJM also works to secure quality after care for the victims.

How does IJM help real people held as bonded slaves?

Narakalappa is a 70-year-old man who was born into a family of bonded slaves (each generation assumes the debt of the previous). He and his children and grandchildren worked as slaves on an agricultural plantation. In June 2003, IJM led a raid on the property to identify and rescue as many bonded slaves as possible. IJM secured the release of 16 slaves, including Narakalappa. For the first time in his life, Narakalappa is now a free man.



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* In order to protect the individuals IJM serves and those who carry out the work, faces of sex abuse victims and particular IJM investigators have been blurred. To further conceal the identities of victims and safeguard ongoing IJM casework, pseudonyms have been used though the accounts are real. Actual names and casework documentation are on file with IJM.

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