



IJM CHENNAI COLLABORATES WITH GOVERNMENT TO COMBAT FORCED LABOR SLAVERY

Hundreds Rescued in Landmark Operation

CHENNAI, INDIA, *April 2011* – Over 500 children, women and men were rescued from forced labor slavery in a single operation this year.

Big Picture: Forced Labor Slavery

Forced labor slavery is the use of force, fraud, or violent coercion to compel someone to labor for little to no pay. For over a decade, IJM Chennai has worked with the public justice system—the police, courts and laws—to protect individuals from forced labor slavery.

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 outlaws forced labor from India, but many public officials lack the capacity or the mandate from their superiors to proactively enforce the law. IJM Chennai leads capacity-building workshops for law enforcement officials, public prosecutors and judges to equip them with the necessary expertise. Additionally, IJM directly advocates with government officials to conduct individual rescue operations. In collaboration with local authorities, IJM Chennai has rescued over 1,800 forced laborers.

One Rescue: Hundreds Free

Earlier this year, a Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO), Kandasamy,

contacted IJM for support after a man reported that his relatives were trapped inside a massive brick kiln. RDO Kandasamy attended an IJM-led training six months before and had since been a strong proponent of enforcing the Bonded Labour Act.

On the day of the operation, RDO Kandasamy led the team of government officials, police and IJM staff. Inside the brick kiln, the laborers were scattered and hard at work. The owner of this brick kiln profited easily from his slaves, who were forced to work 18-hour days without enough food or rest, refused promised payment and viciously beat into submission by the owner or his henchmen. Kandasamy quickly determined that this was a forced labor system.

Kandasamy arranged transportation for the laborers to a nearby school in several trucks. A medical camp was set up to administer check-ups and medication; a water tanker was brought in to provide clean drinking water; police provided 24-hour protection; and classrooms were cleared to accommodate the new arrivals.

Local media arrived on the scene almost immediately. As the laborers recounted cruel beatings, restricted movement and brutal working conditions, a clear picture of the reality of forced labor emerged. Shortly after the operation, the CNN Freedom Project produced a special international report on the remarkable operation, highlighting the importance of government collaboration with IJM.

(Above) When IJM asked “Who wants to leave?” the laborers raised their hands.



(Above) More than 500 children, women and men were rescued from slavery in the brick kiln.

(Left) Since participating in an IJM-led training, RDO Kandasamy has exercised his authority to enforce the Bonded Labour Act. He was a strong advocate for the laborers freed from slavery.

Release Certificates were granted to 371 laborers – including 23 children as young as 8 years old. The certificates cancel their alleged debt and entitle them to government-allocated rehabilitation funds. The emancipated laborers were ready to return to their home state of Orissa. Kandasamy arranged for tickets—and even ordered that an extra train car be added to the next train—to take all of the families back to their home state, 1000 miles away.

“This is the most impressive display we have seen to date of the government being proactive in combating bonded labor and being sensitive to the needs of the victims,” remarked Saju Mathew, IJM South Asia Regional Director. “It is a huge encouragement to work with talented, dedicated officials like these, who clearly demonstrate the potential of the government to lead the charge against bonded labor in India.”

Today, the families are part of IJM’s robust aftercare program, a two-year program for families rescued from forced labor, that includes regular visits to each client’s home and monthly meetings for families living in close proximity. IJM social workers help clients find sustainable jobs and ensure children go back to school. IJM also connects families with Self Help Groups and grassroots NGOs in the respective regions where they resettle, establishing a sustainable support network.

Learn more at IJM.org

IJM’s work in India is supported by the US State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP).

- IJM Chennai was established in 2001 to **assist local authorities in rescuing and rehabilitating forced laborers**, and to **ensure slave owners are held accountable under the law**.
- IJM’s successful collaboration with local authorities was such a compelling model that, in 2005, the **TIP Office awarded IJM a grant to replicate the project** and open another office in Bangalore.
- In 2009, IJM Chennai received a two-year grant from the TIP Office, enabling IJM to build on its decade of anti-slavery casework by **building capacity among Indian authorities and generating awareness through increased media coverage**.
- In collaboration with local authorities, IJM Chennai has **rescued over 1,800 forced laborers** and IJM Bangalore has **rescued more than 550**.

