



# India Committee of the Netherlands

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## APPEAL FOR ACTION

### SUPPORT CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD EXPLOITATION IN THE CARPET INDUSTRY

The India Committee of the Netherlands requests you to support the following demands directed at the European Union (EU) and its member states:

- \* support for the implementation in all member states of the EU of an (already developed) trade mark for carpets not made by children
- \* an import ban at the level of the European Union for carpets which do not carry the certified trade mark label
- \* support for rehabilitation programmes for working children, through NGO's, through bilateral agreements between the EU and India and through international organizations like the ILO.
- \* to make working children a priority target group in the 150 million EU-funded programme for primary education in India
- \* to carry out a survey of other export sectors in which child labour is prominent and to propose an action programme against it, including support for labelling systems, import restrictions and rehabilitation programmes.

#### Child labour

Child labour is still a very widespread phenomenon in developing countries, especially in South Asia. Even in developed countries there are still quite a few children working for their living. Nevertheless 40 countries have signed the ILO convention which sets the minimum age for admission to employment at 15 and for work which jeopardises health, safety or morals at 18. According to the ILO there are at least 200 million working children in the world.

India is the country with the largest number of working children. The South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) estimates their number at 55 million, of which 10 million are in 'debt bondage'. Around 80% of the child labourers are working in the agricultural sector. The rest is e.g. working in brick kilns, stone quarrying and construction, labouring as domestic servant or producing industrial goods like matches, fireworks, glass, cigarettes, locks, gems, shoes, leather products and hand-knotted carpets.

#### Child labour in the carpet industry

The carpet industry in India, as well as other developing countries, is producing almost exclusively for the world market. It earns India an annual amount of about US\$ 200 million. Around 350.000<sup>1</sup> children are involved in carpet production. Some 15% of these children are enslaved through 'debt bondage'. In Pakistan and Nepal the numbers of child labourers in the carpet industry are 500.000 and 200.000 respectively. According to reports by the ILO, SACCS, Anti-Slavery International<sup>2</sup> and other

sources the 'carpet children' are working up to 16 hours a day, sitting together in a cramped position on a single plank in badly lighted and ventilated huts. Many of them suffer from leg and back deformities, asthma, tuberculosis and skin diseases. Two third of them are not living at home and often sleep on the floor of the loom shed. They are deprived of education and recreation.

### **Campaign against child labour**

India's Child Labour Act prohibits the work of children in hazardous industries, including the carpet industry, and regulates working conditions in other sectors. All forms of bonded labour are prohibited as well. Implementation of these laws is largely absent. NGO's have therefore taken up the task to work towards the eradication of child labour. They are cooperating in the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (-SACCS), which consists of NGO's in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The focus of SACCS work has thus far been on liberating and rehabilitating bonded children working in the carpet industry. According to SACCS and, among others, Prof. Myron Weiner<sup>3</sup>, director of the Centre for International Studies (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), it is not primarily poverty which leads to child labour. In a recent interview in an Indian newspaper Weiner states: 'In Indian industry, there is lots of evidence that children are paid wages far below what adults are paid and, consequently, if children are removed from industries, they would be forced to employ adults and pay higher wages. Rather than accept the position that children are employed in India because of poverty, I will reverse the argument and say that employment of children will make poverty worse'.

Despite all the efforts of SACCS the number of 'carpet children' has increased. Since a few years SACCS is therefore asking western consumers to stop buying carpets produced by children. Especially in Germany there has been a big campaign during the last three years by the NGO's Terre des Hommes, Bread for the World and Misereor to make the consumers aware of the issue. But also in other European countries such a campaign has been taken up. In the USA a Bill was introduced by senator Harkin to ban the import of all products made by children. The first phase of this Bill, an investigation of industries employing child labour, was agreed upon and is now being implemented. Later this year the USA will decide on the actual banning of products. Because of the boycott threat a number of Indian carpet manufacturers have formed the Carpet Manufacturers Association Without Child Labour (CMAWCL). SACCS, in collaboration with CMAWCL, the Carpet Export Promotion Council and the Indo-German Export Promotion Project (IGEP) have developed a certified trade mark for carpets not made by children. In Nepal a similar initiative has been taken. The trade mark is to be implemented by an independant foundation (the 'Rugmark Foundation'), whose board is consisting of representatives of SACCS, CMAWCL and UNICEF. The inspection of the requirements of the trademark will both be done by professional inspectors related to IGEP and by (local) members of SACCS. The Board of the Rugmark Foundation has been constituted in May 1994 and it is expected that carpets with the trade mark label will be available in the second half of this year.

### **Support campaign against child exploitation**

According to SACCS a trade mark will only be effective in eliminating child labour in the carpet industry if other carpets are banned by importing countries. Besides India,

Pakistan and Nepal countries like Morocco, Turkey, Afghanistan and Egypt are employing large number of children in carpet-knotting as well. Thus far the German organizations involved in the carpet campaign have not opted for an import ban of non-labelled carpets.

As India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) we feel there is an urgent need to put pressure on the European Union (EU) to stop the import of carpets made by children and to support programmes for the rehabilitation of these children. An important first political step has already been taken. In a recent resolution on 'human rights, democracy and development' the European Parliament requests the European Commission to carry out a survey on imports of products made by children and to propose to the Council of Ministers that these imports be stopped. Thus far there has been no follow-up action by the European Commission.

The ICN requests you to urge your own government and members of parliament as well as the European Commission (attn. of Commissioner Sir Leon Britton and/or Mr. Manuel Marin Gonzalez, Rue de la Loi 200, 1049 Brussels, Belgium) and members of the European Parliament to implement the above-listed demands. We welcome comments and suggestions and hope you keep us informed about your activities and the results of it.

**For more information please contact:**

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1. see: 'Child labour in the carpet industry in Mirzapur-Bhadohi - A situational Analysis & Evaluation of the Government of India's National Child Labour Project', Prof. B.N. Juyal, 1993, International Labour Organization, Geneva
2. see: 'A pattern of slavery - India's carpet boys', Alan Whittaker (ed.), 1988, Anti-Slavery International, London
3. see: 'The Child and the state in India', Myron Weiner, 1992, Oxford University Press, New Delhi

