

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

# Nyaya Pathrika

DECEMBER 2015



**IJM**

*Striking their parai and raising awareness, cultural troupes performed street plays on bonded labour across Tamil Nadu.*



## MINISTER FOR ADI DRAVIDAR AND TRIBAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES 'END BONDED LABOUR' AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

On 29th October 2015, Minister for Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department (ADTWD), Thiru. N. Subramanian, launched the 'End Bonded Labour' Campaign. The event was jointly organised by ADTWD and IJM. Secretary for ADTWD, Thiru. P. Annamalai, IAS and national award winning film director, G. Brama also joined the event as honorary guests.

About 120 bonded labour survivors graduating from IJM's two-year rehabilitation programme were also present at the event. Assuring the audience of the government's will to provide sustenance to struggling communities, Thiru. N. Subramanian, said, "The existing welfare schemes of the Tamil Nadu Government is sufficient to ensure that vulnerable communities do not get trapped in bondage."

Speaking on the importance of creating awareness on the issue, Thiru. Annamalai, said, "The state-wide awareness campaign will continue for a period of 30 days and street theatre artists will perform in vulnerable pockets across

the state. District Adi Dravidar & Tribal Welfare officials, along with NGOs, will drive the message of eradicating bonded labour and making Tamil Nadu bonded labour free."

Hephzibah Sunder, spokesperson for IJM said, "The ADTWD Minister has announced the initiative to launch a database for bonded labourers in the state assembly. We are hoping that the state government will also introduce a state action plan. With these steps, Tamil Nadu can become a model for the rest of the country."

The event concluded with street theatre artists from Dolkattai and Mugavari Cultural Troupes, delivering heart-stirring performances on the abusive and exploitative nature of bonded labour. They rhythmically introduced a helpline number for bonded labour victims to reach out to. This street play was performed in all 32 districts of Tamil Nadu sensitising close to 13,000 people.



## IJM CONDUCTS FREEDOM TRAINING FOR RESCUED BONDED LABOURERS

Despite the heavy downpour experienced in Chennai, 29 recently rescued bonded labourers attended IJM's Freedom Training, held between 30th November and 3rd December. The first step in IJM's two-year rehabilitation programme, Freedom Training is a three-day event where rescued bonded labourers get to interact with IJM's social workers for the first time.

The gloomy weather did not dampen the survivors' spirits! Displaying willingness to learn, bonded labour survivors participated in all the sessions enthusiastically. The sessions largely focused on the importance of healthy relationships, savings, harmful effects of addictions, employment opportunities, government schemes and legal rights.

"The sessions were interactive and lively. The survivors showed a positive attitude towards restoring their families, to sustaining them and keeping rebondage at bay," reflected Barnabas, IJM's social worker.

Experiencing freedom for the first time, one of the survivors said, "We don't want to live in the past. We want to come up in life and be respected in our community. We've laboured for our owner night and day but it was in vain. Now we will labour for our family instead."





▲ Children of former bonded labourers have suffered trauma directly or indirectly and several modules of the rehabilitation programme focus on addressing early trauma and child rights. At the graduation programme, these children seize the opportunity to play with bubbles, balloons and confetti, as they celebrate their freedom and childhood!

▲ Bonded labour survivors were given the opportunity to relate their experiences of bondage, struggle or transformation by selecting a photograph that triggered special memories from their past. Here, Kumari talks about her journey from being a bonded labourer to a petty shop owner.

## **GRADUATION DAY 2015** Marking the end of their journey with IJM's rehabilitation programme, empowered survivors of bonded labour come together on what is known as Graduation Day, to share experiences, interact and elect community leaders who will stand for their community members.



▲ Shanmugam, a bonded labour survivor receives an award from Thiru. Subramanian, Minister for Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, for emerging and excelling as a community leader and entrepreneur. He is one among nine community leaders who have pledged to shoulder the responsibility of advocating for government benefits to reach their community members.

*On 27th October 2015, Thiru. Murugesan, Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) of Ranipet, along with IJM, rescued nine bonded labourers from a brick kiln. He not only gave the rescued bonded labourers their Release Certificates and initial rehabilitation amount, but also issued Community Certificates, applied for ration cards and promised to give land patta to a rescued family that had no home to go back to.*



## 1. Issuing Community Certificate on the very day of rescue was a remarkable move! How do you think this will impact the victims?

According to the Hon'ble High Court's direction, bonded labourers only need Release Certificates as proof of identity to apply for Community Certificates. This inspired me to issue 16 Scheduled Tribe Community Certificates to the rescued bonded labourers and their families on the very day of rescue.

Most people who are prone to bondage in our state are from the Irular community. They are unaware of the importance of this certificate and the government welfare schemes available to them when they have it. Now, they will be able to access government benefits and this can help prevent rebondage.

## 2. Are there other rehabilitation measures that can be taken to support the rescued bonded labourer?

Broadly, there are two kinds of rehabilitative measures—short and long-term. Short-term measures include providing labourers with the initial rehabilitation fund of Rs. 1,000, Ration Cards, Scheduled Tribe Certificates and school admissions for children. Long-term measures include assigning house site pattas or pucca houses and bank loans. If these measures are made available within a stipulated time, rebondage could be prevented.

## 3. What is your suggestion to prevent bonded labour?

Bonded labour can be prevented if the following measures are seriously implemented:

1. All government schemes must be accessible to rescued bonded labourers.
2. Education to at least a minimum degree level should be provided.
3. A house site patta or house with thatched roof can save at least 50% of the community from bondage.
4. Pursuing prosecution and imposing punishment to the offenders under Section 370 of the IPC and under Bonded Labour System Abolition Act can create deterrence.
5. Creating awareness through social media among the general public is also important as it will lead to increased reporting of the crime.



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