

ACTIVITIES ON BONDED LABOR

In December 2008 Supreme Court of Pakistan, under a constitutional petition, ordered that cases of bondage can be petitioned under the Bonded Labor Abolition Act 1992. In the past, these cases would sometimes be dismissed as they were considered disputes between landlords and haris (tenants) over debt and were to be settled under the Sindh Tenancy Act 1950, to be settled by *Mukhtiarkars* of concerned jurisdiction. These officials work under provincial government and are responsible for keeping records of tenants and tenancies.

Mehergarh continued to work on its bonded labor project under its Civil Action Program and released many families from bondage. There are three different ways these families are freed:

- When representatives of people living in bondage approach MeherGarh office, we first try to settle the issue through Police. We issue a Letter to the concerned District Police Officer (DPO) with the details of detained families with request to take action for their release.
- In case the Police does not take any action as a response to our letter and if the family living in bondage is willing, we file a constitutional petition in Session Court under section 491 CR PC or a constitutional Petition in High Court is filed. If the families cannot afford court related expenses, either MeherGarh pays them or they are referred to our allied organizations. These organizations have their own panel of lawyers.
- If the bonded families are very vulnerable and cannot wait for the police procedure or a court case that may take long, we take them away from the possession of Land lords and make arrangements for their settlement in the camps established at the outskirts of Hyderabad and other cities of Sindh. However the families who do not feel threatened by their landlords are free to live any where they want.

Note: The families which are released through courts live a free life as they have court issued Release Documents. However, the families which are released with the help of police or taken away from the possession of landlord always remain fearful because sometimes landlords attempt to abduct them or take them away from camps.

Mehergarh, under its Civil Action Program, organized an awareness campaign in Tharparkar, from where most of the families migrate to Barrage areas of Sindh and become victims of bonded labor. The campaign included seminars, village level meetings, distribution of booklets (Women in Bondage / Jabri Mashaqat ke Qaidi Khawateen), films through multimedia were shown to make people aware of the issue. The documentary, Marwa's Story, always proves to be more effective as majority of the people are illiterate.

DETAIL OF 137 FAMILIES RELEASED IN 2009

1. On Jan. 22nd 2009, a total of 18 Families were released from Muhammad Ali Jamali, District Badin, with the help of District Police Officer Badin. They worked on his land for two years cultivating cotton, rice and sugarcane. When they demanded their wages, the land lord did not give them their due share and started torturing them physically and emotionally. They are free now.
2. On Feb. 12th 2009, 7 families were released from land lord Choudhary Nasir Khan, New Dumbalo, District Badin. They were working as tenants at his field since the last three years but the landlord always refused to give their due share and confined them to their home when they were not working in the fields. They are now living freely.
3. On Feb. 25th 2009, 13 families were released from Village Punhoon Ahmadani, District Mirpurkhas. Men, women and children worked day and night for two years in extreme poverty and unlimited work. When they filed a complaint, they were freed from the land lord.
4. On Mar. 1st, 4 Families were released from Dano Khan Nizamani Matli, District Badin. The families cultivated sugarcane, rice and cotton for the land lord. There was no account of the these families and they often faced severe torture from the landlord.
5. On Mar. 22nd, 9 Families were released from Qalander Bux Gurgez, District Mirpurkhas. The families worked very hard, but did not receive proper share of the crop. The *kamdars* forced women and children to work without rest. Sometimes they severely punished children who looked after the land lord's cattle. Shortage of irrigation water was a common issue as it was at the tail end of the irrigation system. It was a common practice to clean water channels every few days without any compensation to the workers. This is what forced them to register a complaint.
6. On Mar. 30th, 17 families were released from Kaleem Dino Dal, District Mirpurkhas. These families were badly tortured by the land lord and his men. He denied their due share of the crop for three years. The women were tortured and not allowed to move at will. They are now living freely.



7. On Apr. 2nd the family of a farmer, Laloo Kolhi, was released from landlord Haji Samoon of Matli, District Badin. Laloo had worked there for one year. He and his family worked very hard and the only compensation they received was meals. He was forced to work even when he was ill. On his complaint he was released.
8. On May 4th the family of Hero Kolhi was released from Ghulam Qadir Arian Pangrio, District Badin. He had worked there for 2 years. The landlord tortured him for more work. Arrangements were made for his release when he filed a complaint at the MeherGarh office.
9. On May 10th 4 families were released from Waheed Kaimkhani, Kot Ghulam Muhammad, District Mirpurkhas. They worked as tenants at his field for 3 years but landlord was not keeping any account of their work. The women and children were often tortured by his men. On complaint they were released.
10. On Jun. 14th a total of 23 families were released from Muneer Rajar, District Sanghar. The landlord was influential and wicked. He and his men used to torture these families badly. MeherGarh was able to help them live a free life.
11. On Jul. 20th 16 families were released from Punhal Laghari Golarchi, District Badin. The poor tenants worked on his land for more than a year growing rice, sugarcane, cotton, wheat and other crops. They lived in pitiful conditions when they discovered they could file a complaint and free themselves.
12. On Aug. 22nd 6 families were released from Morai village, district Hyderabad. The land lord, Sheikh Birkio is the owner of local Sindh TV Channel, "Mehran". The families cultivated rice and cotton. There was no account set up for these families so, there was no record of them working on the lands. They often faced serious problems and severe torture until they were released.



13. On Sep. 5th one family was released from Haji Juman Rajar district Umerkot. The family suffered much because the landlord forced to do extraordinary labour. The family was released upon filing a complaint.



14. On Dec. 17th 11 families were released from Landlord Haji Allah Dino Halepoto Deh Fatehpur, Taluka Matli, district Badin. They came to work as tenants two years ago and cultivated 40 acres of sugarcane but the landlord denied their fair share. He also refused to give their share from the rice crop which was 3500 maunds.



Note: This list only includes the families released by Mehergarh. The cases referred to partner organizations are not included.