

BONDED STILL

The scourge of bonded labour still exists in some parts of the country despite various attempts to get rid of it. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) considers it as a serious violation of human rights and it is continuing its efforts to sensitise public and the government functionaries at different levels for eliminating this practice. Towards this end, on the 21st August, 2009, a state level workshop was jointly organised by the NHRC and Orissa Government in Bhubaneswar.

Inaugurating the workshop Justice Shri B C Patel, Member, NHRC, said that the fight against the bonded labour system needs fresh initiatives and enthusiasm as seen in 1975-76 to tackle this menace is now missing. NHRC, as per the direction of the Supreme Court in 1997, has been monitoring through half yearly reports, field visits and reviews by its Special Rapporteurs, the pace and progress in the implementation of constitutional and legal provisions on the abolition of bonded labour. Some important observations made by Justice Patel, in his address are as follows :

- In many places there are no vigilance committees to conduct surveys or discrete enquires for identification of bonded labourers.
- There is a growing tendency among the administrators at the district levels not to give due priority to the abolition of bonded labour system. This has been resulting in frustration for poor, deprived and helpless bonded labourers awaiting justice for years.
- Incidence of migration from one state to another has increased.
- Trafficking of women and girls is one of the worst forms of forced labour and violation of human rights.
- Many children have lost precious moments of childhood as their parents are bonded labourers.

Justice Patel further observed that enactment of the laws is not an end in itself to stop bonded labour as this is not a one time problem. He said that a committed political leadership along with the strength, courage of conviction and sensitivity of the bureaucracy, particularly the district magistrates, is extremely important to ensure eradication of bonded labour system. Some of his important suggestions for effective fight against this problem are as follows:

- Familiarisation of bureaucracy at all levels with the provisions of Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act and the judgements of the Supreme Court.
- Timely action at the district level with the correct application of the law to avoid needless delay in settling the complaints of bonded labourers.
- Constitution of Vigilance committees at grassroots level and their field visits for an objective assessment of the bonded labour problem.
- Orientation and training programmes for all members of vigilance committees at different levels and the DMs, SDMs and Executive Magistrates.
- Creating sustainable avenues of employment with enforcement of notified minimum wages.
- Watch on migration through involvement of panchayats.
- Ensuring easy access to institutional credits for income generating activities and promoting group savings funds at grassroots level.

[Courtesy : Human Rights News Letter]