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MODERN DAY SLAVERY IN SOCCER BALL PRODUCTION

Child Labor and Debt Bondage in India

Washington, D.C. – The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) and Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) in India released a detailed report today on the extensive use of child labor and debt bondage in the production of soccer balls in two villages in India: Jalandhar and Meerut. The research identified as many as ten companies sourcing from these two villages which sell their soccer balls in the United States.

“While the sporting goods industry made a commitment to stop child labor in their supply chains when the problem was first identified in Sialkot, Pakistan in 1997, this report shows that bonded child labor continues in the industry and has shifted to India,” said Trina Tocco, Campaigns Coordinator at the International Labor Rights Forum.

This report follows a recently aired segment on HBO’s “Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel” which details **cases of child laborers stitching soccer ball panels together between their knees with a sharp needle – even on soccer balls emblazoned with a “CHILD LABOR FREE” label.**

After over a decade of promised reforms from the sporting goods industry, child labor in soccer ball production continues. Efforts in the 1990’s to expose abuses in the assembly of soccer balls in Pakistan pushed businesses into India, where children continue to work in this industry. **The report shows that industry initiatives have failed to improve the lives of thousands of children forced to work in Meerut, India to pay off the debt of their parents.** For years, companies have said that they have extensive monitoring programs to make sure child labor is not used in the production of soccer balls and yet in plain sight, children walk through Meerut every morning to deliver their finished balls to the local subcontractor and pick up the supplies for that day.

In poverty-stricken Jalandhar and Meerut, **children can be found working 10-15 hour days for pennies a day and sometimes for no pay at all.** The children revealed their overworked hands, covered in cuts and gashes, and complained of severe back pain and strenuous conditions. When asked their dreams for the future, children voiced their desires to go to school or even get to play with the soccer balls they spend hours stitching. Even these simple dreams are out of reach, since families are forced to put their children to work in order to pay off a debt.

The major U.S. sporting goods companies need to be held responsible for human rights violations in the production of their goods. It is essential for the soccer ball industry to

again reconfirm its commitment to eradicate child labor from its production. **This time the commitment from the soccer ball industry must be more than a piece of paper and must include full transparency of their supply chains, fair pricing to their suppliers, and independent monitoring throughout the entire supply chain.**

The report is available online at: <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/foulball-campaign/resources/1733>

[The International Labor Rights Forum \(ILRF\)](#) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide.

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