

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION®

Sandana's Story



CHENNAI, INDIA – Sandana* was only 12 years old, but her voice was the one that would make all the difference.

She and her younger sister, Geetika,* stood side by side, as the government official asked their families questions. They and their parents, along with the other families gathered together, had just been rescued from forced labor slavery at a rice mill.



It was a terrible place: The owners of the rice mill refused to let the workers leave, they beat them, and they even doused one slave's arm in kerosene and set it on fire as punishment.

Because these sisters were willing to speak up, their families were set free.

But now that the families stood before a government official with the authority to set them free from slavery, they were too afraid to tell the truth – because the owners had threatened to kill them if they ever told anyone what was happening in the rice mill.

One by one, the defeated slaves denied that they were being forced to work or being abused. Until Sandana stepped forward. Though she was young, Sandana found the courage to do what the slave owners feared the most: she spoke the truth. Sandana explained that her dad *couldn't* tell the truth, that the owner beat her father and that everybody else was too afraid to say what was really happening.

Struck by the raw power of innocent truth, the government official said he did not think someone Sandana's age would lie about such things. Emboldened by their courage, their father finally shattered the lies and spoke the truth. Because of Sandana's brave testimony, all of the adults received official release certificates, setting them free from the owners' control and entitling them to government-allocated rehabilitation money.

IJM helped the families resettle in their villages, and Sandana and Geetika started going to school. Their parents started working and eventually built a new home. IJM also supported a trial against the rice mill owners, and both men were convicted because they had run their business with slave labor.

**A pseudonym has been used for the protection of this IJM client.*