



CHENNAI, INDIA

THE PROBLEM FORCED LABOR SLAVERY

Chennai is one of the oldest port cities in southern India, and a new technology corridor is bringing more jobs and opportunity to this city of 4.9 million people.

But just outside the city, entire families are forced to work as forced labor slaves on factories, farms and businesses that produce the bricks, rice and other staples of Indian life. Business owners use fear tactics, deception and abuse to traffic and enslave people for years, sometimes generations. We have met forced labor slaves who have been beaten, gang raped, locked in tiny rooms and starved for attempting to escape. India's laws clearly ban forced labor slavery, but enforcement has historically been weak, with very few convictions and even fewer meaningful sentences.

IJM CHENNAI PROGRESS SINCE 2001



7,000+

victims rescued from slavery



1,640+

currently participating in our two-year aftercare program for rescued slaves



23,250+

police, government officials, NGOs and others trained by IJM



THE FACTS

40.3 million people are estimated to be held in slavery worldwide.¹



1 in 4 forced labor slaves are children.²

India has the largest number of people in slavery: an estimated 18.4 million.³

One third of manual laborers in Tamil Nadu (the state where Chennai is located) are held in bondage.⁴



“At last I could go home and give the best education for my children, and lead a wonderful, happy life in freedom.”

—Muthu, about the day she was rescued from slavery

How IJM Chennai Combats Forced Labor Slavery

We rescue children and families by identifying factories, farms and businesses where they are trapped as forced labor slaves. We partner with government officials and police to enter the worksite, conduct interviews, and ensure each victim is legally emancipated under the law.

We bring criminals to justice. We begin by advising officials on how to file protection reports that will keep families safe from an owner’s threats. We help public prosecutors press charges and pursue justice in local courts by collecting evidence, researching laws and legal precedent, and helping survivors prepare to share the truth.

We restore survivors by providing a two-year aftercare program developed by IJM social workers. We begin with Freedom Training, a three-day series of seminars and life skills training. Social workers then provide counseling, facilitate monthly group meetings, visit survivors in their homes, and help families achieve their goals (like opening a bank account or buying a house). We help adults pursue dignifying jobs and ensure children can enroll in school.

We strengthen justice systems by providing hands-on mentoring and training for government officials combating forced labor slavery. Our current System Reform project began in 2013, and we equip police and district attorneys to handle forced labor slavery cases.

IJM CHENNAI MILESTONES

2001

IJM CHENNAI OPENS

2010

LANDMARK CONVICTION

A rice mill owner is convicted for “habitual dealing in slaves”—a severe offense not successfully used since the 1880s.

2016

MASSIVE RESCUE

We help rescue 564 people from a life of slavery in a single brick factory.

2016

LONGEST SENTENCE

A judge convicts eight traffickers to life in prison—the longest sentence ever in an IJM slavery case.



DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS MERLIN FREEDA

Merlin joined IJM in 2011 to lead our community engagement initiatives and raise awareness about forced labor slavery. Today, she heads the IJM Chennai team to rescue victims and engage with the local justice system. Once a leading television news anchor, Merlin sees her new role as one called to encourage the transformation of individuals and communities.



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INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION is a global organization that protects the poor from violence throughout the developing world. IJM partners with local authorities to rescue victims of violence, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors, and strengthen justice systems.

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