

Iqbal and Craig:

Two children against child labour



IQBAL MASIH:

the Pakistani child campaigner who was murdered

When Iqbal Masih was four years old, his father sold him to a carpet weaver for \$12. That's how Iqbal became a slave, a bonded worker who could never make enough money to buy his freedom. He was chained to his loom, and worked 12 hours a day making carpets.

At the age of 10, Iqbal escaped and he began to speak out against child labour. People listened, not only in Pakistan where Iqbal lived, but around the world. In 1994, Iqbal went to North America, where he visited Broad Meadows Middle School in Massachusetts* and talked to North American children about child labour.

A few months after returning to Pakistan from his visit to the USA, Iqbal was murdered. He was shot while he was riding his bicycle with his friends. He was 12 years old.

CRAIG KIELBURGER:

the Canadian boy who started an international organization

Craig Keilburger was also 12 years old when Iqbal Masih was killed.

The magazine interviewed him 2 years later, when he was 14. He had already started the organization, **Free the Children**; he had travelled around the world, speaking about child labour and visiting working children; he had appeared on TV, talked to politicians, and testified to a US Congressional committee.

BONDED WORKER:

a worker who has been bought and will not be free unless they can buy their freedom

CHAINED: Locked to something with metal chains

LOOM: the equipment that a carpet is made on

* When pupils at Broad Meadows Middle School heard about Iqbal's death, they decided to take action. Visit their website and find out about [A School for Iqbal](#)

TESTIFY: if you testify, you give evidence about something and make a legal promise that you are telling the truth

The Congress of the United States makes the laws in the US. It has

many
CONGRESSIONAL
COMMITTEES that
investigate issues.

SIMILARITIES: The
ways that things
are alike (similar)
ABOLISHED:

Stopped; banned;
no longer allowed
ADVOCATE:

somebody who
actively speaks out
for something

Craig talks about Iqbal

It was two years ago that I first read an article about Iqbal Masih. The article talked about his life ... [and it said that] he was murdered. I was also 12 years old at that point and so basically I looked at my life and I looked at his and saw the differences and the similarities.

We were the same age. I could imagine Iqbal, I could imagine his dreams were the same - the article said that he wanted to become a lawyer and how he hoped to use that to free children. It talked about how he loved school and spoke about some of the things that he did when he was freed.

But the big things that shocked me were the differences. I'd always thought, well slavery, bonded labour, it's something out of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - it's been abolished, it no longer exists.

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His death is a mystery, but whoever he was murdered by, it doesn't matter. It was what he spoke up for that was important - he was an advocate against child labour who started to take action in his own country.

How Craig started Free the Children

I began doing research on the issue [of child labour] and then took what I knew and went to my class. I said: "This is what I want to do - and who wants to help?"

From there it started to expand. Free the Children started as a group of 20 kids in a suburb of Toronto, Canada. Now we have groups in Canada, the US, Australia, Brazil. We have young people involved in Singapore, we get calls from Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, all around the world.

Young people have the power to make a difference

The single biggest problem we've had is adults who will not take us seriously, who think that because we are young we will oversimplify the issue of child labour and not do our research. Many of our members are as young as nine or ten years old but we do our research as well as taking action.

Child labour is a very complex problem, that's the truth. But that can't be used as an excuse not to take action. Consumer pressure can change things. In Pakistan, for example, consumer pressure resulted in the Government raising the amount they spend on primary education ... and building more than one thousand literacy centres. Even companies are beginning to take action in response to the pressure. Young people are beginning to realize their power ...

We're a group of young people who volunteer to give up some of their spare time to work on this issue. We're not against children working, we're against children being abused and exploited.



Well, I've met children who work 12 hours a day in agriculture, or sweatshops, or fighting a war. (Picture: Craig with a child brick-maker in Pakistan) But, at the other extreme in North America, Europe and Australia there are children who are given no responsibility and no chance to get involved. I think the reason why Free the Children has grown so quickly is that we've given young people those opportunities. They haven't seen what they're doing as too difficult: they've seen it as a challenge they can rise to. Laura Hannant is a girl aged 12, from Ottawa. She just got

back from an International Child Welfare Conference in Chicago, where she was one of the main speakers. Before that, she was in South Africa and Holland. So you see what some people can do when they're given the chance!

Free the Children

NI interviewed Craig in 1997. To find out more recent information about Free the Children and its work, you can visit their website:

Free the Children International:

<http://www.freethechildren.org>

Young Activist's Death Hits Pakistani Carpet Sales : Trade: Exports to West have diminished even though producers haven't been linked to death of 12-year-old who fought child labor.

May 31, 1995 KATHY GANNON | ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAHORE, Pakistan — Already hit with sagging exports, Pakistani carpet dealers say they have lost more sales to Western buyers since the killing of a young activist who spoke out against child labor.

The death of Iqbal Masih, 12, received worldwide publicity after a group that is fighting child labor blamed carpet industry owners. But residents of his village later said Iqbal was slain in a fight with a farm worker, and Pakistan's leading human rights group says there is no evidence implicating the industry.

Iqbal's case attracted attention because he had been to Sweden and the United States to speak at conferences denouncing child labor. He had worked as a carpet weaver from age 4 to 10.

Imran Malik, vice chairman of the Pakistan Carpet and Manufacturers and Exporters Association, estimates \$10 million worth of orders have been lost since the April 16 shooting.

"Carpets that were once considered a piece of art are now looked upon as if the blood of children has been used to make them," Malik said.

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The carpet industry, one of the biggest exporters in this impoverished country, was facing lean times even before Iqbal's death. Exports fell from \$183 million in 1992 to \$149 million last year, the government says.

The United States, the largest importer of Pakistani carpets, purchased \$42 million worth last year, down from \$55 million two years earlier.

"With this controversy, our wholesale carpet buyers don't want to take the risk and buy Pakistani carpets," said Abdul Latif Malik, a leading Lahore carpet dealer who says he has lost at least \$300,000 in sales since Iqbal's death. He is no relation to the vice chairman of the carpet association.

Usman Ashraf of Usman Carpet House in Lahore said he has lost \$80,000 in sales since mid-April. "It is all related to the young boy's death," he said.

Both dealers said Western buyers had contacted them to say they would not be making further purchases due to the furor over the killing.

But in New York, carpet dealers contacted by the Associated Press said they had seen no backlash against Pakistani carpets since Iqbal's death, although one said reports of child labor overseas had sparked questions from a few customers.

"There isn't a major scare that I'm aware of, but all carpets have not been selling as well because of the downturn in the economy," said Michael Harounian, a partner in the New York-based Harounian Imports.

Harounian and Larry Feldman, president of the Rug Warehouse in New York, both said they try to ensure they do no business with carpet makers who use child labor.

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Anti-Slavery International, a British-based group that campaigns against forced labor, estimates carpet makers employ about 500,000 children under 14 years old in Pakistan, 300,000 in India and 110,000 in Nepal.

Children are prized by carpet makers because their tiny fingers make small, tight knots, the sign of a truly fine carpet.

Hand-knotted carpets also are made in Iran, China, Afghanistan, Morocco, Turkey, Peru and some former Soviet states.

"Apart from the former Soviet Union, where we have no information, we have information to suggest that child labor is used to some extent in all these countries," said David Ould, spokesman for Anti-Slavery International.

It was the campaign against child labor that drew attention to Iqbal's killing.

The Bonded Labor Liberation Front, a private group in Pakistan, blamed the slaying on Pakistan's "carpet mafia," although it provided no evidence.

An AP reporter who visited Iqbal's village outside Lahore was told by numerous residents that the youth was shot by a farm worker after a petty dispute. Iqbal's cousin, who was wounded in the shooting, told the same story to police, who have arrested the farm worker.

The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the country's most respected human rights group, said it found no evidence tying the carpet industry to Iqbal's death.

In dirt-poor villages where there are not enough schools, children are routinely sent out to find work in mills, brickyards and garages before they reach their 10th birthday.

The conditions are often filthy and dangerous and the daily pay can be as little as one rupee--the equivalent of three cents. But in such an impoverished region, many people accept child labor as normal, including the children.

"Children themselves say, 'We're earning a living.' The family says they need the money," said Shireen Khan, a spokeswoman in Islamabad for the International Labor Organization, a United Nations group.

Pakistan passed legislation in 1992 that says children under 14 are not allowed to work, but the law is not enforced.

If Pakistan does not show some progress, it could lose preferential tariffs on its carpet imports into the United States, Commerce Minister Ahmed Mukhtar said.

"It's like a sword dangling over our head," he said.

10 Child Labor Facts



Child labor, as defined by the International Labor Organization, is "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development." The persistence of child labor is one of the biggest obstacles to human rights globally.

[Child Labor](#) perpetuates poverty by depriving children of education and subsequently renders these children without the skills needed to secure the future of their countries.

10 Child Labor Facts

1. Australia annually imports \$16 million worth of tobacco produced by child labor, including tobacco produced in the U.S. Tobacco cultivation is extremely labor intensive and children are often subjected to serious health risks including nicotine poisoning. Most cigarette smokers in Australia are unaware of the origins of the tobacco they consume.
2. According to the ILO, 168 million children worldwide are engaged in child labor as of 2013.

3. Of these 168 million children, 85 million are engaged in what the ILO deems "hazardous work"
4. According to a study conducted by the ILO in 2004, the benefits of eradicating child labor would "outweigh costs by nearly six to one."
5. The sub-Saharan African region has the second highest number of child laborers in the world; about 59 million in 2012. According to the Pew Research Center, children aged five to 17, or 21.4 percent, are involved in child labor while 10.4 percent are engaged in hazardous work.
6. Agriculture accounts for 60 percent of child labor according to the ILO.
7. Only one out of five children involved in child labor is paid for his or her work.
8. The majority of children in child labor perform unpaid family work.
9. The 10 countries that Maplecroft listed as the worst countries for child labor in 2012 included Pakistan, [Afghanistan](#), North Korea and Myanmar. The other six countries were all in Africa: Sudan, DR Congo, Somalia, [Ethiopia](#), [Burundi](#) and Zimbabwe.
10. About 60 percent of children in Ethiopia are engaged in some form of child labor. Many of these children work in the mining industry; an industry that poses some of the biggest dangers for child laborers.

Many parents in impoverished countries push their children to work out of necessity. Unable to sustain their families on their own income, the parents feel that they have no choice but to push their children into child labor.

One of the best ways to combat child labor is to provide fair wages and safe working conditions for parents so that they can provide for their families without being forced to depend on their children. To fight against child labor is to fight against global poverty.

Sources: [Huffington Post](#), [allAfrica](#), [SMH](#), [Rescue](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [The Guardian](#), [ILO 2](#), [U.S. Department of Labor](#), [Pew Research Center](#)

Photo: [Geneva Mission](#)

Young Migrant Workers Toil in U.S. Fields

By Karen Fanning

Santos Polendo remembers his first day of work like it was yesterday. He was just 6 years old.

"The weather was terrible," says the 16-year-old migrant farmworker from Eagle Pass, Texas. "I had blisters on my hands. My back was hurting. My head was hurting. I never thought I was going to make that my life."

Yet, for the past 10 summers, backbreaking farmwork has been part of Santos's life and that of some 800,000 other children in the U.S. The same poverty that drove young Santos into the onion fields of Texas continues to push generations of other American children into a similar life of hard labor.

Migrant children travel with their families throughout the United States to work in agriculture. They journey from state to state, from one farm to the next, following the crop harvests. They toil, day in and day out, on America's farms, to help their struggling families survive.

Santos, however, is eager to break that cycle of unending labor. With the help of organizations like Motivation, Education, and Training (MET), an organization that services more than 1 million migrants in 48 states, Santos and thousands of other migrant children may no longer have to drag their weary bodies out into the fields.

"We have tutors and instructors here that help migrant children with their assignments," says Roberto Oliveras, MET Youth Coordinator in Eagle Pass. "We provide field trips to college campuses. We tell them through education, through studies, they will be able to do other things, have other choices of jobs. They don't have to be out in the fields. They don't have to migrate."

Lost Education

In many ways, Santos is lucky. His family only works during the summer months. However, many other children are forced to leave for the fields as early as April. Often, they don't return to school until October or even November.

Each May, the school year ends early for 15-year-old Dora Perez so that she can make the 30-hour drive with her family to Minnesota. There, they spend the summer harvesting sugar beets.

"The work starts before school ends, so we just have to go," says Dora, a freshman at Eagle Pass High School. "We don't like going up there, but we need the money to pay our bills. We have to help out our parents. The family does better when everybody's working."

Once they return to school, many migrant farmworkers struggle to catch up with their classmates. In order to make up for the many months of lost education, they are often forced to attend classes after school and on Saturdays.

While most parents like Santos's want a better life for their children, a typical farmworker earns \$7,500 a year or less—hardly enough money to support a family. As a result, parents are faced with a difficult dilemma: keep their kids in school or send them out into the fields.

"The families are so poor, they need their kids' income in the fields," says Reid Maki of the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. "Farmworkers do not make a living wage. Without pooling the resources of all the family members, they cannot live. They can't get by. They can't pay their rent and utilities, so they desperately need their kids to work."

Year after year, faced with the prospect of falling further and further behind, many children become discouraged and stop attending school altogether. In fact, experts estimate as many as 65 percent of migrant children end up dropping out of school.

"Many of them drop out, not because they don't want an education, not because their parents don't want them to have an education, but because it becomes such a futile endeavor for them," says Ellen Trevino of MET. "They're tired. They're worn out. Everything seems to be stacked against them."

All in a Day's Work

For Santos and Dora, the workday begins at 6 a.m. and ends at 6 p.m. There is little time for the usual summertime activities that most American kids take for granted. After returning home from work, they eat dinner, take a shower, and go to bed to rest up for yet another 12-hour workday. Rarely do they get a day off.

In many cases, child farmworkers must endure sweltering temperatures, as there is little shade to shelter them from the heat. Too often, they also suffer from on-the-job injuries. Santos recalls an incident when he accidentally stabbed himself with a pair of scissors. Dora remembers cutting her foot on a hoe.

"I didn't have my shoes on and tripped on it and slashed my toe," she says. "I didn't feel it until I saw that my sock was stained with blood. I had a pretty bad cut. It was real deep."

For Dora, however, there was no trip to the emergency room. Like most farmworkers, she was forced to fend for herself. She wrapped up her foot and rested in the family's car, then returned to work the next day.

Among the many dangers children face on the job are pesticides. Migrant children regularly labor in fields that are sprayed with these toxic chemicals, which can cause skin irritations and breathing difficulties. Their small, undeveloped bodies are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of pesticides.

"We have airplanes spraying pesticides over our heads," says Dora. "We're out in the fields, and all of a sudden, here comes the airplane throwing all the pesticides at us. We get rashes from the pesticides."

A Better Life

With another summer behind them, Dora and Santos are back in school. In the afternoons, both teens attend the MET Youth Center, which provides local migrant children with computer training, homework help, and visits to area college campuses. For Santos, MET has made a difference.

"We have teachers here that can help us," he says. "They helped me with projects, and they helped me to study for some tests. My Cs and Bs turned into As and Bs, and everything was thanks to MET."

Now Dora and Santos can look ahead toward a brighter future, one that includes college. As for Santos, who has already worked in Minnesota, New Mexico, South Dakota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, California, Oklahoma, Ohio, and Iowa in his short life, he looks forward to settling down with a family of his own.

"I've never gotten any rest," says the high school sophomore, who would like to study art in college. "I'm studying all year in school, then in the summer, I have to work. What

kind of life is that? If I have kids, I will never even show them a field. They can see a field from a book. I want them to grow up and have a better education than I had and be somebody."

About the Author

Karen Fanning is a contributing writer for Scholastic News Online.

Causes of Child Labor

Child labor persists even though laws and standards to eliminate it exist. Current causes of global child labor are similar to its causes in the U.S. 100 years ago, including poverty, limited access to education, repression of workers' rights, and limited prohibitions on child labor.

Poverty and unemployment levels are high.

Poor children and their families may rely upon child labor in order to improve their chances of attaining basic necessities. More than one-fourth of the world's people live in extreme poverty, according to 2005 U.N. statistics. The intensified poverty in parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America causes many children there to become child laborers.

Access to compulsory, free education is limited.



Photo: David Parker

In 2006, approximately 75 million children were not in school, limiting future opportunities for the children and their communities. A 2009 report by the United Nations estimated that achieving universal education for the world's children would cost \$10-30 billion -- about 0.7% - 2.0% of the annual cost of global military spending.

Existing laws or codes of conduct are often violated.

Even when laws or codes of conduct exist, they are often violated. For example, the manufacture and export of products often involves multiple layers of production and outsourcing, which can make it difficult to monitor who is performing labor at each step of

the process. Extensive subcontracting can intentionally or unintentionally hide the use of child labor.



Carpet Weaver

Nepal, 1993

Photo: David Parker

Laws and enforcement are often inadequate.

Child labor laws around the world are often not enforced or include exemptions that allow for child labor to persist in certain sectors, such as agriculture or domestic work. Even in countries where strong child labor laws exist, labor departments and labor inspection offices are often under-funded and under-staffed, or courts may fail to enforce the laws. Similarly, many state governments allocate few resources to enforcing child labor laws.

National Laws Often Include Exemptions

Examples

Nepal

minimum age of 14 for most work...

plantations and brick kilns are exempt.

Kenya

prohibits children under 16 from industrial work...

but excludes agriculture.

Bangladesh

specifies a minimum age for work..

but sets no regulations on domestic work or agricultural work.

Workers' rights are repressed.

Workers' abilities to organize unions affect the international protection of core labor standards, including child labor. Attacks on workers' abilities to organize make it more difficult to improve labor standards and living standards in order to eliminate child labor. For example, in 2010, 5,000 workers were fired and 2,500 workers were arrested as a result of their union activity, according to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

The global economy intensifies the effects of some factors.



Photo: David Parker

As multinational corporations expand across borders, countries often compete for jobs, investment, and industry. This competition sometimes slows child labor reform by encouraging corporations and governments to seek low labor costs by resisting international standards. Some U.S. legislation has begun to include labor standards and

child labor as criteria for preferential trade and federal contracts. However, international free trade rules may prohibit consideration of child labor or workers' rights.

The effects of poverty in developing countries are often worsened by the large interest payments on development loans. The structural adjustments associated with these loans often require governments to cut education, health, and other public programs, further harming children and increasing pressure on them to become child laborers.

Debt and Child Welfare

The example of Sub-Saharan Africa

Though the region receives \$10 billion in aid per year, it loses more than \$14 billion in debt payments annually, according to MediaGlobal.

In Malawi, the country spends 40% of its GDP to repay foreign creditors, while only 15% of GDP is spent on healthcare and education combined.