

Prayer Effort Launches for Missing Children in South Asia

The children of South Asia are among the most vulnerable in the world. The United Nations estimates that 1 million Asian children are traded every single day. In India alone, 45,000 children are reported missing each year. Thousands more are missing, but their families have not reported their absence to authorities.

The majority of these missing children come from Dalit ("Untouchable") families, from tribal areas or from families that live in extreme poverty.

Children in South Asia go missing for many reasons. Some are abducted by strangers and put into forced labor. Others are trafficked or exploited in the sex trade or sold to other families to work as domestic help. Some missing children have simply run away from home or were forced to leave home because of difficult circumstances, such as the death of a parent or the introduction of a stepparent into the household.

India has the largest population of poor and vulnerable children of any country in the world. Nearly 44 million children live on the street as beggars. Millions are orphans. Others may be the children of migrant workers, commercial sex workers or prisoners. Thousands are also child soldiers who have been forced into armed conflict. Thousands of children were recruited to join rebel forces in Sri Lanka during the civil war with Tamil militants.

Sadly, there are many waiting to exploit these vulnerable children. One of the most common ways children are misused is by being forced into the adult workforce.

Child Labor Snapshot

India has some 13 million children younger than 15 in its workforce—more than any other country in the world. Some estimate that the real number of child laborers is close to 100 million. That's about five times the population of the state of New York.

In neighboring Thailand, almost 1 out of every 10 children between ages 10 and 14 is working rather than going to school. In Bangladesh, an estimated 27 percent of children ages 10-14 are working. These children are employed in a variety of hazardous occupations, such as making cigarettes by hand, construction, tanneries, fishing and seafood processing, and the garment industry.

The majority of working children in South Asia were born in rural areas and most often labor in agriculture and related fields. They also manufacture shoes, carpets, clothing and silk thread for the Western world. Children work in the diamond and gemstone industries as well.

In India, 17 percent of domestic workers, the country's maids and nannies, are younger than 15. At least 65 percent of them entered the workforce between their ninth and twelfth birthdays. According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 150,000 child domestic workers. In Sri Lanka's capital city, Colombo, about one of every three households has a child younger than 14 working in their home. One of the most physically punishing forms of child labor occurs in Sri Lanka's commercial fishing industry. The children working on the boats are kept in slave-like conditions, and the nature of the work keeps them far away from the public eye.

Another danger to children—especially those from extremely poor families—is child trafficking. UNICEF estimates that 4,500 children from Bangladesh are trafficked to Pakistan each year. Thousands more are sent to India and to countries in the

Middle East. Most often, the children are sold into bonded labor or to brothel owners.

How to Pray for Them

Even though these children's parents may not know where they are, their Heavenly Father knows them and cares for them. The following list describes some of their prayer needs:

- Pray for the children to be rescued, reunited and accepted back into their families.
- Pray for GFA-supported missionaries and workers who reach out specifically to the runaway children, especially those who try to rescue the thousands of street children in Delhi.
- Pray for the physical needs of the children. Most do not get enough to eat, and the physical labor they are forced to do can cripple their young bodies. Pray for the Lord to provide for them and protect them from harm.
- Pray for the girls—and boys—forced to work in the sex trade. Ask the Lord to bring the brothel owners' and customers' misdeeds into the spotlight and for the love of Jesus to permeate those dark places.
- Pray for a radical attitude shift in South Asian society so that citizens of these countries will demand an end to the exploitation of children.