

Young Christians Trafficked Into Forced Labor and Sex Slavery in Bangladesh

More than 140 children have been rescued from Islamic training centers (madrassas) in the last nine months, with a majority of the children targeted because of their Christian faith. The females, accounting for nearly half of those rescued, report that they were used for forced labor and sex slavery.

New information has come to light regarding the treatment of the young girls rescued from madrassas earlier this year. "They were forcefully converted to Islam," said Akash, a contact for International Christian Concern (ICC) whose name is changed for security reasons. "The girls were made to wear veils at all times. Some girls were also forced to work as slaves in the homes of Muslim families and were only fed one time a day."

The rescued girls were told they would study at a Christian school and receive training to become beauticians. However, after completing the grueling travel from their villages to the capitol city, Dhaka, they discovered it was all a lie. "Instead of training in the Beautifying Parlor, we were forcefully sent to hotels for the sex trade," explained one of the girls.

Suspicious Lead to Rescue

Last year Akash was selling bus tickets for a transportation company in Bangladesh when he noticed that a man named Norbert Tripura frequently traveled to Dhaka with groups of children. When asked what he was doing, Norbert replied that he was taking the children to a Christian missionary school "where they can eat and live in comfort with a good education."

Hoping for his daughter to have the opportunity for a quality education, Akash asked Norbert to take her to the Christian missionary school, and became suspicious when he was refused. "Doubt was created in my mind when Norbert continued to avoid me," said Akash.

Akash began to investigate the matter and soon discovered that countless families had sent their children with men, including Norbert, who were later discovered to be traffickers. With the help of an ICC ministry partner, Akash arranged for the rescue of the first twelve children in July. More were rescued in October, followed by over 100 rescued since January.

How Does This Happen

As Christians, these children and their families are a marginalized minority in a country that is over 90 percent Muslim. As minorities, Christians find it difficult to locate jobs and obtain quality education. They are sometimes even banned from using community wells in the villages. As a result, many Christians, specifically the Tripura people, are extremely poor and desperate for a better life for their children. This, in turn, leaves them vulnerable to traffickers like Norbert.

Reports by The Kapaeeng Foundation and ICC's partner in Bangladesh indicate that there may be as many as 138 children from Rangamati, 42 from Banderban and six from Khagrachari that are still missing. "We think they are also sold to madrassas and we are searching for them," said Akash. "It is my dream that all the children will be rescued and receive a higher education so that they can stand on their own two feet."

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