

**For attention:** Mr. Tomoya Obokata  
**Email:** [srslavery@ohchr.org](mailto:srslavery@ohchr.org)  
Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Dear Mr. Tomoya Obokata,

## **Submission on the Nexus between Forced Displacement and Contemporary Forms of Slavery**

We attach our written submission in response to your call for input on the nexus between forced displacement and contemporary forms of slavery.

Should you have any queries, please contact Tove van Lennep ([tove@arisefdn.org](mailto:tove@arisefdn.org))

Yours sincerely,

Tove van Lennep  
Manager of Frontline Advocacy  
Arise

## About Arise

Arise is an anti-slavery NGO headquartered in London and New York, and working to prevent slavery in India, Albania, the Philippines and Nigeria. We believe that local groups and their networks hold the key to ending slavery and human trafficking. We provide funding and training to frontline groups, build anti-slavery networks, commission relevant research and advocate for change.

Arise seeks to amplify the exceptional insight and experience of frontline groups within the policy and human rights communities, while advocating for the change they want to see.

## Methodology

Arise sent a survey on the nexus between forced displacement and contemporary forms of slavery to 11 religious sisters in our India network, working against slavery in their communities.

6 responded that there were no displaced people in their communities. They are located in Nadia District (West Bengal); Krishna Nagar (West Bengal); Ranchi (Jharkhand); Ranga Radda District (Telangana); Tiruchirapalli (Tamil Nadu) and North Lakhimpur (Assam).

5 responded with information about the displaced people in their communities. They are located in Silchar (Assam); Guwahati (Assam); Samalkha, Faridabad and Karnal Districts (Haryana); Krishna Nagar (West Bengal) and Mukherjee Nagar (Delhi).

This report is based on the information provided by the responding group.

## Findings

### 1. Place of origin of affected persons

Respondents only reported the presence of *internally* displaced persons (IDPs), usually from neighbouring states.

A respondent in Samalkha, Haryana reported an estimated 6000 to 8000 IDPs coming from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Punjab.

A respondent in Guwahati, Assam reported the prevalence of IDPs from Assam and other parts of North East India.

In Assam, respondents reported IDPs in:

- North Lakhimpur, Sirajuli Tea Garden, where many of the tea garden workers were displaced from Amtola Village, Assam
- Dhemaji and Dhubri districts, where many are forced to move during floods: 'During flood time, the "agents" are very active in recruiting children for metro cities, for various kinds of work such domestic help, small manufacturing companies, etc.'

### 2. Reasons for displacement

Respondents reported that IDPs are fleeing:

- 1) Violence and armed conflict, including that of Naxalite militants in the East of India
- 2) Human rights violations
- 3) Natural disasters, including floods, cyclones, storms and droughts

### **3. Forms of slavery that IDPs are subjected to**

- 1) **Forced labour:** One respondent estimated that there are between 5,000 and 6,000 IDP workers in bonded labour in the tea gardens of Bihar and Rajasthan, and between 500 and 1,000 IDP forced labourers in Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Forced labour was reported as prevalent amongst IDPs in Uttarakhand, Haryana and Assam (Amtola Village).
- 2) **Child labour:** One respondent estimated that there are between 2,000 and 3,000 IDP child labourers in Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. The prevalence of child labour in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal and Assam was highlighted. Another respondent cited the statistics that 5% of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in Assam is a child labourer; there are 280,000 child labourers in Assam; and in the Sonitpur district, 6.5% of children are child labourers (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020).
- 3) **Forced marriage** was reported as prevalent amongst IDPs in Madhya Pradesh. One respondent estimated that between 100 and 200 IDP women are subjected to forced marriage in Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Bihar.
- 4) **Sexual slavery** was reported as prevalent amongst IDPs in cities including Guwahati, Aizawl, Shillong and Silchar, as well as in Chhattisgarh. One respondent estimated that there are around 50 sexually enslaved IDPs in Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Bihar.
- 5) **Domestic servitude** was reported in West Bengal, Delhi and Assam. In Assam, one respondent estimated that there are close to 600,000 domestic slaves, of which some are displaced people. Another respondent estimated that there are at least 25 displaced people living as domestic slaves in Bihar and Jharkhand.

### **4. Industries involved in the exploitation of IDPs**

The tea garden industry was reported with particular concern, particularly in Assam, where government authorities are complicit in perpetuating the cycle of debt bondage that many displaced people find themselves in.

Other industries identified were brick kilns (in Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Haryana); factories, poultry and hatcheries (in Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh), construction work and domestic work (nation-wide). Quarries and mines owned by big corporations and land owners in West Bengal and Boropahari were also identified.

### **5. Settlement/ living conditions of IDPs**

All respondents reported that displaced people in their communities live in their own settlements, rather than in designated centres or camps.

However, exploitation was highlighted:

- In the tea gardens, where workers are confined in settlements and cannot afford to leave or be educated
- In quarries, mines and brick kilns, where workers live in settlements around the factories rife with disease (TB and silicosis) due to poor working and living conditions
- In the slums, where domestic workers are forced to live, highly vulnerable to further exploitation and health risks

One respondent stressed that lower caste groups are more vulnerable to displacement and exploitation. It was reported that the state gives land to identified caste groups and then seizes it back when required. These caste groups are subsequently displaced.

Families in Amtola Village, for example, were forcibly removed by the government with bulldozers, forcing them to live on the banks of a river.

## **6. Comparing the exploitation of IDPs and nationals**

Respondents argued that a lack of shared identity and documentation makes displaced people more vulnerable to exploitation than locals. It was reported that local authorities are not motivated to help displaced people and that displaced people are unable to access social security schemes and benefits.

Lower wages, longer hours and lack of access to local amenities and education were reported. It was suggested, moreover, that the exploitation of displaced people goes undocumented as a result of their economic, social and political exclusion.

One respondent reported that in the brick kilns of Haryana, local people work reasonable hours, while displaced people are forced to work much longer hours (10 - 12 per day).

## **7. Gender dimensions of the exploitation of IDPs**

In general, exploitation was reported as not being particular to either gender. However, respondents reported that females are more likely to be exploited than males in domestic servitude and sex trafficking. One respondent cited the 'culture of honour' as leading to sexual exploitation and harassment being under-reported.

## **8. Sub-groups of displaced people affected by a particular form or extent of slavery**

Children were highlighted as a sub-group of concern, suffering long working hours, low or no wages and terrible working conditions, as well as forced marriage.

- In Arunachal, children are subjected to forced labour in mines, quarries and domestic work
- In the brick kilns of Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, thousands (2,000 - 3,000) of children are subjected to forced labour. In Amtola Village in Assam, child labour is common in the tea gardens
- In Samalkha and surrounding areas, children are used for drug trafficking and illegal activities

## **9. Local legislation or lack of legislation contributing to vulnerability of displaced people**

Respondents reported that the same labour standards are applicable to IDPs as to other nationals, but that there is a general failure to enforce national labour laws including the Minimum Wages Act 1948, 1996 Labour Law and 'fundamental rights'. Workers are often not aware of the laws that exist to protect them.

One respondent argued that even where labour standards are respected, many workers (such as IDP tea garden workers) are paid too little to survive.

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation & Resettlement Act, 2013, was reported as the only national law that seeks to address problems faced by people displaced due to development.

It was reported that there is no legislation to protect the reproductive rights of displaced women.

Respondents argued that IDPs have very little legal protection, support from the state and access to justice, but that NGOs sometimes provide temporary relief.

## **10. Impact of COVID-19 on the exploitation of displaced persons**

Respondents explained that COVID-19 has worsened the exploitation of displaced people. Many displaced people lost their jobs, only to be met with little to no support from their employers or government. The pandemic highlighted the job insecurity of displaced peoples as opposed to locals. It also prevented the normal movement of displaced people.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

A nexus exists between forced displacement and contemporary forms of slavery in Northern India, supported by survey data provided by frontline workers in Assam, Haryana, West Bengal and Delhi.

Internally displaced groups appear more vulnerable to multiple forms of slavery including child labour, forced labour, bonded labour, domestic servitude, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Child and forced labour are particularly common in the tea gardens of Assam and the brick kilns of Haryana.

Social and economic exclusion, together with a lack of legal protection, contribute to the vulnerability of displaced people. With little job security and political will to support them, IDPs have been hit harder than local groups by the pandemic.

Even though this is a small-scale study, it complements what Arise normally finds on the ground through our anti-slavery networks in India, Albania, the Philippines and Nigeria. We therefore propose the following recommendations:

1. **National labour laws should be properly enforced**, necessitated by political will and pressure from the international community and civil society

2. **Workers should be empowered with knowledge of their rights**, led by awareness raising campaigns and mandatory rights empowerment training by businesses
3. **Legislation to protect internally displaced persons and refugees** from contemporary forms of slavery should be introduced, and access to justice extended
4. **Research should be pursued** on the extent and nature of slavery and exploitation within IDP groups and the population at large, to fill the current vacuum

*The Arise Foundation is a registered charity in the UK (1165248) and is 501(c)(3) exempt in the United States (EIN 81-1111051)*

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