

Miss Ramsay

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Skills Development

aged 15 years

We live in a tolerant society. The dictionary describes tolerance as the ability to put up with unpleasant circumstances. If that is so, then we have succeeded! The infamous activist, Martin Luther King, had a dream of a tolerant society where his children would be free and have equal opportunity with white children. I was once reading a book that led me to the tragic tale of Rael, a boy in India, also had a dream. That dream was freedom and the opportunity to have a childhood. When he was seven years old, his mother died. His father borrowed sixty dollars to pay for the funeral from a moneylender. At fifteen percent interest the family was unable to keep up with the re-payments, so the moneylender took Rael into bonded labour. Bonded labour is modern day slavery, it is designed so that the family can never repay the debt. His job was to roll beedies (cheap cigarettes), seven days a week. Each day he went to the small factory at six a.m. and kept rolling beedies till seven p.m.

His back ached; his fingers became twisted and bent from the cramped conditions. His lungs were weakened by the unhealthy fibres. There was no school, little food and no chance to play or just be a child. What would you expect to be paid for all this work? Rael received about four dollars a month. If he made a mistake he was fined and his debt became larger. If he fell asleep he was punished. If he didn't fill his two thousand a day quota, he was beaten. If he tried to run away, he was brought back, chained and abused. One day Rael was so sick and weak, he just gave up the fight. Rael was just one of the two hundred and forty-six million child labourers in the world today.

Child Labour is robbing children of the human rights that they are entitled to on God's green earth. But our tolerant society forgets about these individuals and worries about more "important" issues such as children's television shows like Noddy promoting homosexuality or that 'Bah Bah Black Sheep' a rhyme, that is meant to bring joy to children, is being racist. The society we live in is not concerned with developing countries and their basic human rights. And this, I find intolerable. If you were given the choice to save a child from a life of torture and deprivation or to debate the fact that a sheep is racist and a wooden toy is homosexual, which one would you choose?

Yes, we do live in a tolerant society. A society which tolerates two hundred and forty-six million children, aged four to fourteen years, working long hours in shocking conditions. They live with no hope for an education or escape from the nightmare they call life. We live in a society which tolerates one hundred and eighty-six million children working in hazardous conditions, exposed to noxious fumes, harmful chemicals, dangerous tools and machinery. A society that tolerates the fact, that eight million children who are slaves to bonded labour, prostitution and are used as child soldiers. Yes, this does describe a tolerant society. A society that is able to put up with unpleasant circumstances. In Pakistan alone, ten million children slave. One million of those children are in carpet factories, trapped by debt, chained and beaten so their small hands can provide cheap and efficient labour to make those precious hand-knotted rugs so prized by rich consumers.

These children will never finish school, never escape poverty and will not live long lives. Do they have a voice? Does anyone listen for their faint sounds? Does anyone

hear their cries? Yes! Organizations like *World Vision*, *Save the Children Fund* and *UNICEF* rescue children and are advocates for 'The Rights of the Child' at international levels.

What can we do to stop the tolerance of the physical, mental and emotional abuse that the world's children suffer enslaved in the worst kinds of child labour? We too can be their voice. We can raise awareness and strengthen the political will to fight child labour in its worst forms. We can be careful consumers and buy Fair Trade Goods and check labels for manufacture. Petition governments to cancel debts owed by poor countries so they can afford to educate and develop resources to fight the poverty, which causes child labour. We can support the efforts of organisations that work for human rights. We can join with those who had a dream, like Martin Luther King and Rael, to build a tolerant society with equal opportunity for all.

I also have a dream. My dream is to see every child labourer in the world freed and for child labour to be made strictly illegal. My dream isn't impossible and if the whole world got behind my dream than it would become a reality and opportunity for so many young people to restart their lives.