

The Children's Jury Gives Its Verdict!

In November 2007, over 1000 children from all over India came together in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, for a unique convention. The convention was called, in Hindi, *Hum Bacche Saath Saath Bal Mazoori Ke Khilaaf* – We Children Together Against Child Labour. Over three days, children from very different backgrounds came together to learn from each other, and to come to a common understanding about child labour.

There were boys who worked 16 hours a day underground in mines, and there were boys who went to school in air-conditioned buses. There were girls who slogged in the cotton fields all day, and girls who thought nothing of spending five hundred rupees on a meal. Living together, eating, sleeping, playing, singing, and talking, they got along wonderfully. The children who had no rights at all became more aware of the need to be a part of the campaign, and so did the children who had all the comforts they wanted. At the end of the convention, children in the worst imaginable circumstance spoke in front of a jury of adults and children. Here is what the children's jury concluded:

We have heard some shocking stories today, and have interacted with the delegates over the last two days. After listening and discussing, we have come to the following conclusions:

Who is responsible for the children's situation?

- 1. The government, which does not implement laws and policies properly.*
- 2. Uneducated and ignorant parents who send children to work.*
- 3. Employers who exploit children.*
- 4. The whole of society, all of us, who don't raise our voice against child labour.*

We suggest that the following steps should be taken to solve the problem:

- 1. Education and employment in the remote areas of our country.*
- 2. Education given to parents to make them understand the importance of education and the bad effects of child labour.*
- 3. Campaigns and events that help children's voices to be heard.*
- 4. A law that defines children as those below 18 in all cases.*
- 5. More training and equipment for the police.*
- 6. Children's clubs and groups so that our voice is heard and we help each other.*
- 7. 'Tent schools' and similar facilities where schools are not available - but these should be a temporary solution.*
- 8. Training to the whole public so that they understand why child labour is bad.*