



Content Area: Government and Economics

Text Type: Speech

Source: *Iqbal Masih and the Crusaders Against Child Slavery* (Nonfiction book)

We Are Free

By Iqbal Masih

Part 1

When he was just ten years old, Iqbal Masih escaped from the factory where he had worked (making carpets, since age 4) to attend a Freedom Day celebration held by the Bonded Labor Liberation Front (BLLF), a human rights organization that fights against forced labor. On that day, Iqbal became free both physically and emotionally. The rally inspired him so much that he walked to the front of the crowd to speak about his experience as a bonded child laborer. Iqbal never again worked in the carpet factory. Instead, he set out on a personal mission to help other enslaved children gain their freedom and their stolen childhoods.



Iqbal inspires the crowd.

Within two years, Iqbal became a spokesperson for BLLF, helping to free 3,000 children in Pakistan from their forced labor in carpet and textile factories, brick kilns, and leather tanneries. In December of 1994, he came to the United States to receive a Human Rights Youth in Action Award.

This is the speech he gave on that occasion, at the age of twelve.

Part 2

I am one of those millions of children who are suffering in Pakistan because of bonded labor and child labor. But I am lucky. Due to the efforts of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF), I am free and I am standing in front of you here today.

After I was freed, I joined the BLLF school. I am studying in that school now. For us slave children, Ehsan Ullah Khan and BLLF has done the same work that Abraham Lincoln did for the slaves in America. Today you are free and I am free, too.

WORDS TO KNOW

bonded labor work, usually for very low wages, done to pay off a debt impoverished poor

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SAM Keyword: Stretch Text W4



We Are Free *(Continued)*

Unfortunately, the owner of the business where I worked told us that it is America who asks us to enslave the children. American people like the cheap carpets, the rugs, and the towels that we make, so they want bonded labor to go on. I appeal to you that you stop people from using children as bonded laborers because the children need to use a pen rather than the instruments of child labor.

Part 3 → Children work with this instrument. [Iqbal holds up a carpet tool.] If there is something wrong, the children get beaten with it. And if they are hurt, they are not taken to the doctors. Children do not need these instruments but they need this instrument, the pen, like the American children have. [He holds up a pen.] Unfortunately, many children do not use pens right now. I hope that you will help BLLF, just as they have helped us. By your cooperation BLLF can help a lot of children and give them this instrument, the pen.

Part 4 → I share what I remember, how I was abused and how other children are being abused there, including those that are insulted, and are hung upside down, and are mistreated. I still remember those days I saw Pakistani-made rugs in American stores, and I was very sad knowing that they were made by bonded labor children. I felt very sorry about it. I request President Clinton to put sanctions on those countries which use child labor. Do not extend help to those countries still using children as bonded laborers. Allow the children to have the pen.

And with this, I gratefully and thankfully acknowledge this prize. Thank you.

We have a slogan at school when children are freed. We all together say we are free. And I request you to join me today in raising that slogan here. I will say, "We are," and you will say, "Free."

WORDS TO KNOW

sanctions penalties or other actions meant to influence a nation to follow international law

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