

URGENT Action



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India:

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Women workers in the Chikan Kari handicraft industry are denied minimum wages in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh



Chikan Kari is handicraft work with thread patterned on cotton cloth. Women mainly do this time consuming handicraft. But they are paid way below the minimum wages. For many this meagre income is necessary to prevent starvation.

Background

Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) is highly populated with nearly 170 million people. 80 percent are settled in rural areas. The per capita income in U.P. is \$120, which is clearly under the Indian average of \$330. Lucknow, the state capital, situated in the centre of U.P., has two million inhabitants. 60 percent of the inhabitants depend on service with government departments and private enterprises, 35 percent depend on agriculture while 5 percent depend on the local handicraft called Chikan Kari.

Chikan Kari is a fine and intricate manually designed pattern with thread on cotton cloth, mainly decorating women clothing. Chikan Kari cloth and clothes have a good market at national and international levels and is exported to U.S.A., Great Britain and the Gulf countries. Women mainly do the Chikan Kari handicraft work while men are involved in trading and marketing. Chikan Kari is very time-demanding and the intricate work puts a lot of strain on the eyes. Many of the Chikan Kari workers eventually lose their eyesight.

To make one piece of Chikan work it takes five to seven hours for which a Chikan worker earns 6-8 INR since wages are determined by the type of stitches used and there is no fixed piece rate system. Women Chikan Kari workers generally earn INR 30 per day. They get work from stores through middlemen. This arrangement reduces their bargaining capacity to get a better price for the handicraft and makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Chikan Kari work belongs to the informal sector where women and men are not organised. Due to illiteracy and lack of awareness the women are unable to demand their entitlement of a minimum wage of INR 58.50 under the Minimum Wage Act of 1948. (1 Euro = 55 INR)

On September 17, 2004, the Government of India established a "national commission for unorganized sector". This is an advisory organ, which should monitor the situation in the unorganised sector and send periodic reports to the government. However, presently this organ is not functioning. A labour inspector was in place to monitor workers conditions. But this position was abolished in 2003. According to the minimum wages act, 1948: "Inspectors – The appropriate Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, appoint such persons as it thinks fit to be inspectors for the purposes of this Act and define the local limits within which they shall exercise their functions". It is therefore not obligatory for the state of Uttar Pradesh to have an inspector. But it is an important position in order to safeguard and ensure the rights of the workers in the unorganised sector like Chikan Kari.

FIAN – With human rights against hunger!

FIAN Mandate

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India and therefore the state of Uttar Pradesh is duty bound to fulfil the Chikan Kari workers right to feed themselves, by ensuring that they are paid according to the minimum wage with a fixed piece rate. An income below the minimum wage excludes the Chikan workers from accessing food.

An international intervention is urgently needed to fulfil the right to food of Chikan Kari workers and to stop their ongoing exploitation. Please write letters to:

Mr. T.V. Rajeswar
Governor of Uttar Pradesh
Governor House,
Lucknow - 226001
Uttar Pradesh, India
Fax: 0091-522-2237444
0091-522-2625995

Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
Room 152, South Block
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***Please inform FIAN
International about any
response you receive
to your faxes and letters.***

End of Action:

**25th April,
2007**



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FIAN – With human rights against hunger!

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Lucknow - 226001
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Honourable Governor,

Recently, I heard the disturbing news about the situation suffered by the Chikan Kari workers in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The Chikan Kari industry is part of the informal sector, where 96% of all working women in India are employed. Women in the Chikan Kari industry are paid way below the minimum wage of INR 58, 50. Yet for many of them, the meagre income is needed to prevent starvation.

According to Uttar Pradesh legislation, a worker must be paid a minimum wage of at least INR 58, 50 for a day's work. This should also be implemented in the informal sector. In the Chikan Kari industry wages are determined on the types of stitches, therefore there should be fixed a piece rate system to enable the Chikan Kari workers to get a minimum support price.

India has signed the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights and is therefore duty bound to fulfil the right to adequate food of the Chikan Kari workers. The low payment of wages deprives the Chikan Kari workers of the means to access food. As a person working internationally for the implementation of the human right to food, I would like to ask you to:

1. Implement the Minimum Wages Act 1948 according to affixed piece rate system in order to secure the women's right to feed themselves.
2. Reconsider and reinstall the position of a labour inspector (preferably female in order to monitor working conditions). This had been in place but was then abolished in 2003.

Please inform me about the steps you plan to take in this matter.

Yours sincerely,