

CHILD JOCKEYS

Abu Dhabi - Camel racing is the national sport in the United Arab Emirates. The sport is conducted in a similar fashion to horse racing in the West, with the notable exception that the jockeys are children that were bought from impoverished families. In 2005, pressure from activists was thought to have ended the practice when the United Arab Emirates (UAE) officially banned anyone under the age of 18 from the sport. Of course, a law prohibiting anyone under the age of 15 from acting as camel jockeys had been on the books since 1993. It was not enforced by police who dared not tamper with the sport favored by the UAE's royalty. Even after the United Nations helped by providing robots to serve as jockeys, the practice continued. UNICEF declared victory when about 1,200 of the estimated 20,000 children used in the dangerous races were returned home as part of a repatriation scheme. Some of the children even received checks for about \$1,000. They were originally purchased for about half of that amount from families in Pakistan who were unable to feed them.

In 2010, five years after the second ban, activists with Anti-Slavery International were appalled to find the practice still going on. Catherine Turner said at the time. Bux Taheem, an inspector with Pakistan's Intelligence Bureau, states that there are at least a dozen child-slavery rings linked to the camel races operating in the small district of Pakistan he is tasked with maintaining. Taheem did make it very clear that the children were not kidnapped, but that their parents willingly handed the children over, typically because they are too poor to feed them. Hundreds of children are being smuggled out of Pakistan in violation of the law every year. Once in the UAE, the boys are kept in an "ousbah," an isolated training facility where they are beaten and forced to work 18-hour days. The children are fed as little as possible to keep their weight down in hopes of allowing the camel to run faster. There have been reports of the boys being sexually abused. The races are the most dangerous times for the children because a fall could leave them maimed or dead. Crushed genitals from the rough ride on the backs of the camels are common. If a camel falls and both the camel and the child are injured, the camel is treated for its injuries first because it is more valuable. A summit on child and sex trafficking will discuss the issue on November 30th. The summit will be held in the United States and will be attended by representatives from the United Nations, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other agencies.

Kidnapped children sold into slavery as camel racers

At least 30 boys a month are being kidnapped in Pakistan to feed the banned slave trade in racing camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates.

According to a human rights organisation in Pakistan, the number of boys - often as young as four - smuggled abroad to work at camel camps is rapidly rising.

The Karachi-based Ansar Burney Welfare Trust (founded by Ansar Burney, a human rights lawyer) claimed last week that 2,000 boys have been taken to the camps over the last two years, despite laws introduced in the UAE in 1998 forbidding the use of small boys in the often dangerous sport.

The trade in boys for camel racing has long been the subject of a campaign by both the UN and Anti-Slavery International. Evidence, however, suggests the practice is becoming more prevalent.

According to a report last year by Anti-Slavery International, the children are often kidnapped, sold by their parents or relatives, or taken on false pretences.

In the UAE the boys are often underfed and subjected to crash diets to make them as light as possible. Some children have reported being beaten while working as jockeys, and others have been seriously injured during races.

The rules of the Emirates Camel Racing Federation forbid the use of riders under the age of 14, or weighing less than 45 kilograms.

The UAE government said in 1998 it was doing its best to eradicate the practice and that 'any camel owners found to be in breach of the rules should be severely punished'.

Anti-slavery campaigners have had some successes in returning camel slaves. Two years ago an eight-year-old Pakistani boy, who had allegedly been kidnapped to work as a camel jockey, was repatriated by the authorities.

He was one of the luckier ones. In August 1999, a four-year-old jockey from Bangladesh was found abandoned and close to death in the desert. In 2000, Anti-Slavery International reported the case of a four-year-old jockey from Bangladesh whose employer burnt him on his legs for under-performing. The boy was left crippled. Although some of the children are taken as indentured labourers with the parents' consent,

in other cases children are drugged and abducted. All 10-year-old Mohammed Zubair Arrian remembers of his abduction last year is meeting a mysterious red-bearded man in his village in Pakistan, and then waking up from a drug-induced stupor in an airport thousands of miles away. The red-bearded man told him he was now a camel racer at which point he fled the airport. Police believe Mohammed was drugged and smuggled into Abu Dhabi on a Pakistan International Airlines flight on a forged travel document. The boy said he met the red-bearded man in Medina Syedan, his village in Punjab province. He remembered losing consciousness, but nothing more until he awoke at Abu Dhabi airport. 'When I opened my eyes, I was in a totally different world,' Mohamed said. The abductor 'threatened to kill me if I made any noise. But as soon as he turned his back, I ran for my life.'

A passer-by found him crying on the streets of Abu Dhabi on 6 September, and turned him over to police. He was eventually brought back to Pakistan when Burney heard about his case.

In November UAE police rescued two other Pakistani brothers aged six and four who had been kidnapped to work as jockeys.

They had raided a camel farm in the oasis town of Al Ain on a tip from the Pakistani embassy and rescued the two boys. The six-year-old, Shajar, was being treated in hospital for leg injuries.

Burney maintains that most of the agents kidnapping the children were Pakistani. He said they could 'easily get fake birth certificates, passports, and even fake parents, so the camel owners thought they were brought in with full consent'. Children are sold for up to US \$3,000 (£2,100) each.

What's Being Done to Stop It?

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 provides tools for the U.S. to combat trafficking in persons. The trafficking of children for sport, such as for use as camel jockeys, is prohibited by the United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery and International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182. Many of the states where child camel jockey trafficking is prevalent are parties to ILO Conventions 29 and 138, the Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime on Trafficking in Persons and to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which also prohibit the practice.

The United States works with the Gulf States to stop the trafficking and exploitation of minors as camel jockeys and encourages those countries to return the sports activity to its original roots as a traditional pastime. The U.S. also works with source countries to stop the flow of children trafficked into the Gulf region. In December 2004, the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) established a shelter to care for former child camel jockey victims. Many boys served by the shelter have been trampled, suffer from broken limbs and have never seen a doctor. As many as 400 children were reportedly rescued and repatriated through efforts of source country representatives and NGOs in 2004. To aid in prevention, the U.A.E. has introduced stricter screening procedures (including iris identification methods) at airports and conducts DNA and bone density testing to establish positive identification and claimed child/parent relations, but much more is needed to ensure the rescue of children trapped in a life of degradation. What Needs To Be Done? When dealing with an issue of this importance and urgency, there is much to be done. The U.S. is asking governments to prevent the crime and increase rescues and protection of victims. Traffickers must be prosecuted, and laws must be enhanced and enforced.

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