

## **Child Labor in the Soccer Ball Industry**

### **A Report on Continued Use of Child Labor in the Soccer Ball Industry in Pakistan**

#### **International Labor Rights Fund**

**February, 1999**

#### **Highlights of the Report**

In 1996, we first called attention to the bonded child laborers producing soccer balls for the world market in Sialkot, Pakistan. These children, often working in debt servitude, were producing balls carrying major labels like Challenge, Baden, Nike and Adidas. In response to the exposes, soccer ball manufacturers agreed to participate in a monitoring program sponsored by the ILO. The program had the stated goal of eliminating child labor from the soccer ball industry in Pakistan within 18 months. The program intended to provide former child workers with educational opportunities, so that they were not simply forced to work in another industry.

Now, a year into the program, independent researchers have discovered that child labor persists in the Sialkot soccer ball industry. Moreover, even according to the ILO's own assessment of the program, it is beset with a number of problems. These include:

- Many manufacturers who signed onto the program have not paid dues or provided any details about their stitching centers.
- Even participating employers are still using children in their stitching centers, and in home-based employment; the ILO is not empowered to apply any sanctions to these employers.
- Soccer ball production may be shifting from Sialkot to nearby, unregulated regions of Pakistan, and some children may be moving from production of soccer balls to production of surgical instruments.
- Schools established for soccer-stitching children may instead be serving other children, while former soccer stitchers are employed in other work.

In short, we are deeply concerned that soccer ball manufacturers and retailers may be using their participation in the program to claim their balls are "child labor free," without actually taking sufficient steps to remove children from the production process.

Despite these problems, the ILO is planning to expand the program to the soccer ball industry in India and initiate a similar program in the carpet industry in Pakistan. We feel it would be a mistake to expand the program to another country or to another industry before it has been able to achieve its goal of eliminating child labor from the Pakistan soccer ball industry. **We encourage the ILO to address the problems identified in this report before endorsing a single manufacturer or expanding the initiative in any way.**

#### **Introduction**

In 1996, the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) began a campaign called "Foul Ball" to call attention to the plight of thousands of children working full time to stitch soccer balls for the world market in villages in the Sialkot region of Pakistan. Some of these children were working in debt bondage. The campaign mobilized soccer players and consumers of soccer balls around the world, and led to the establishment of an international program to eliminate child labor from the Pakistani soccer ball industry and to establish schools to ensure that these children received an education. The initiative was organized by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children (UK) and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) in December, 1997. Now, one year later, ILRF's independent research findings indicate that the use of child labor in this industry persists. The report below details our new findings and summarizes the mid-term report of the ILO on the progress of its initiative.

## **Background**

Soccer, or "football" as it is known in most countries, is the world's most popular sport. It is played by millions of people worldwide. Not surprisingly, the soccer ball industry is a multimillion dollar industry. Most of the world's soccer balls are produced in the Sialkot region of Pakistan. Pakistan alone accounts for 75 percent of total world production of soccer balls, and 71 percent of all soccer ball imports into the United States. The remainder of production occurs mostly in China, India and Indonesia. No soccer balls are manufactured in the United States.

Pakistan is a country with a population of 140 million people. Forty-one percent of the population are age 15 or younger. The country's economy is largely based on agriculture, and approximately 50 percent of the population are employed in the agricultural sector. One-third of the population live in absolute poverty according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Sialkot region of Pakistan has been famous for producing soccer balls for at least 80 years. It is estimated that there are about 10,000 urban workers and 30,000 rural workers in the 1,450 villages of Sialkot involved in the production of soccer balls.

Although some balls are machine-made, the best soccer balls are hand-stitched. Hand-stitching the panels of a ball together is a very labor-intensive process and is where children have been found working. Stitchers sew together the panels of a soccer ball and glue in the inflatable bladder. They are employed by subcontractors, typically on a piece rate basis, and may work in a stitching center, small village workshop, or in homes.

In 1996, an ILO study in the Sialkot region estimated that more than 7,000 Pakistani children between the ages of 5 and 14 stitched balls on a regular, full-time basis; some worked as long as 10 to 11 hours a day. In addition, large numbers of children worked part-time outside of school hours. On average, these children were paid between 20 to 22 Pakistani rupees per ball, or about \$0.50 to \$0.55. The average worker can stitch two or three balls per day. Independent local activists found that many of these children were working in bondage to their employers to pay off their parents' debts. Thus, they and their families were unable to escape their labor obligations, and the children were unable to attend school, ensuring that as adults they would continue to suffer in poverty and possible continued debt bondage.

## **The ILO Initiative**

Adverse publicity in the United States and Europe about children stitching soccer balls prompted action by soccer ball retailers and by concerned activists to ensure that balls were produced without child labor. In September, 1996 the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA), the world regulatory agency for soccer, adopted a Code of Labor Practice for all manufacturers of balls carrying the FIFA

label. FIFA already had a program of quality control in place to certify and label all balls used in international tournament play. The organization collaborated with three trade union bodies: the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF), and the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, and Technical Employees (FIET) to develop a comprehensive code of labor practice to be added to the quality control criteria for all goods bearing its logo. The code not only prohibited the use of child labor, but also guaranteed workers' rights to organize and to bargain collectively, to fair and safe working conditions, and to several other protections.

Unsurprisingly, this code attracted considerable anxiety and animosity from the World Federation of Sporting Goods Industries (WFSGI) when it was announced, leading to the formulation of a WFSGI Code, and to an effort to limit damage to the industry by a program to eliminate child labor from the making of soccer balls in Sialkot. This program was negotiated between the ILO, UNICEF, Save The Children (UK), and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, representing soccer factories. On February 14, 1997, in Atlanta, Georgia, representatives of all these organizations signed the Partners' Agreement to Eliminate Child Labour in the Soccer Industry in Pakistan. The program intended to eliminate child labor from the soccer ball industry *within 18 months*, through the creation of new opportunities for children with an emphasis on education and training. As a result of the Atlanta Agreement on child labor, the more complete FIFA code has never been implemented or subjected to monitoring.

### **The ILRF Research Findings**

The ILO program began in late 1997. In late 1998, the Association of Network for Community Empowerment (ANCE), based in Lahore, Pakistan, conducted an independent investigation into the effectiveness of the ILO program. A research team visited 23 villages in the Sialkot region to determine whether or not children continued to work on soccer ball production either within village stitching centers or at home, and whether new educational opportunities had been offered to these children through the ILO program. The team not only found that children continued to work in stitching centers in these villages, but also heard reports that a number of children had been shifted from soccer ball production to the production of surgical instruments. The majority of child workers interviewed had never attended any educational institution.

The investigation was conducted between August and October, 1998. The ANCE researchers were known to ILRF as individuals with a history of activism on child welfare issues. The team interviewed adult workers, child workers and residents of the villages, as well as factory owners, local officials and ILO monitoring team officials. The research team visited 23 village stitching centers, selected at random out of several hundred in the region. Out of these 23, they found child workers present in eight centers. The adult workers were asked about the absence of children from the stitching centers where children were not present. They informed the researchers that the production of soccer balls was seasonal, and that they were in the slow season. They indicated that during peak season it was more likely that children would be brought into the centers, or that excess production would be outsourced to children in homes. During the slow season for soccer balls, they stated that children are often sent to work in the surgical instruments industry.

The adults were asked about the presence of ILO monitors in the region. They responded that the system of deploying ILO monitors has unwittingly created an "early warning" system for employers. Since the ILO monitors are residents of the local communities, they are known not only to employers but to most local residents. Interviewees told researchers that employers are very often "tipped off" when the monitor is en route to the stitching center, and are able to hide the child workers. Furthermore, adult workers noted that some stitching has been shifted from the centers to private homes, to which the

monitors do not have access.

Another problem noted by local inhabitants was the relocation of stitching centers. Because the ILO project has targeted the region of Sialkot, some manufacturers have relocated to other nearby districts, out of the jurisdiction of the ILO inspectors.

The research team noted that the ILO project was intended to rehabilitate child workers through the establishment of educational facilities. However, no educational centers were found in any of the 23 villages visited.

Finally, ILRF has learned from another independent NGO observer that although 36 manufacturers have signed onto the Atlanta Agreement, to date only 16 have paid their dues and submitted information about their stitching centers. In short, more than half the “participants” in this program appear to be free riders, benefitting from the positive publicity around the ILO program without taking a single step to eliminate child labor from their facilities!

### **The ILO Mid-Term Assessment**

The ILO has issued its own mid-term assessment of its monitoring project. The review was completed in November 1998, after the program had been in place for one year. With six months to go, the ILO reports that the program has had the following successes:

- The total number of manufacturers participating in the program has expanded from 22 to 36. However the ILO report notes that this represents only half of all soccer ball manufacturers in the Sialkot region, and only about 65 - 70 percent of all production for export from the region.
- Fifty percent of all manufacturers participating in the program (e.g. 18 manufacturers) have shifted production to stitching centers monitored by the ILO. The ILO report notes that the remaining participating manufacturers continue to outsource some production to children working at home.
- The program is currently monitoring 379 stitching centers, and will begin monitoring an additional 80 women-only stitching centers. There are 15 monitors who operate in teams of two and conduct “regular, unannounced visits” to the centers. The ILO report states that 163 children have been found at work in the centers since the program began, and that “many” of these children have been removed from the workplace and given educational opportunities.
- Approximately 5400 children are attending education centers established under the program. The program has established 154 non-formal education centers. The report notes that many of the children attending the centers continue to work part-time as soccer ball stitchers at home.

### **Recommendations for Action**

ILRF recognizes that the problem of eliminating child labor from any industry is a difficult one, and that the 18-month time frame agreed to in the 1997 Partners’ Agreement may be insufficient to deal with this task. We commend the ILO program for having established new educational opportunities for children in the Sialkot area and we hope these opportunities can be expanded. However, we are concerned by the findings of the ANCE report. We believe that in order to be truly effective, the ILO monitoring program must address concerns raised in this report. We are particularly concerned that the ILO is now planning to expand this initiative to India. We feel it would be irresponsible of the parties involved to expand the program to another country without first addressing the serious problems inherent in the current initiative.

We also note that issues raised not only by the ANCE report, but also by the ILO mid-term assessment, suggest that many manufacturers who have signed on to the program are still using child labor. At least half the manufacturers who entered the agreement have not taken any steps to eliminate children from the production process. Stronger actions may be therefore be needed to bring these manufacturers, and the retailers they supply, to a more wholehearted commitment to eliminate child labor. Also, many manufacturers in the region are not even part of the agreement, further undermining the ability of the program to eliminate child labor from the industry.

We would like to highlight the following problems with the ILO program:

- *Unregulated soccer ball production in nearby districts.* Some manufacturing of soccer balls is being shifted away from Sialkot to other districts where no monitoring exists. Manufacturers who claim to be participating in the ILO program should not be allowed to make such claims if they are in fact shifting production to other locales. Participating manufacturers should be required to make available to all partners in the Partners' Agreement, as well as to the ILO monitoring team, a complete list of production facilities both within and without the Sialkot region.
- *Continued use of children by participating employers.* We are disturbed by the fact that some of the participating manufacturers are continuing to use home based child labor, even after signing the Partners' Agreement. This signals that the manufacturers are not truly committed to eliminating child labor. We understand that these manufacturers have committed to eventual shifting of production to ILO-monitored centers, but see no reason why they should continue to use children in the interval. The manufacturers should be required to provide names and addresses of individuals to whom stitching is being outsourced, so that ILO monitors can visit homes in which production is occurring and verify that children are not involved with production.
- *Failure of the inspectors to remove identified child workers from the industry.* We are concerned by the fact that the program appears to have identified working children both through investigations of stitching centers, and also through its informal education centers, but that steps have not yet been taken to remove these children from the industry. The report notes that several children attending the education centers are also stitching balls at home part-time. While we understand that it may be difficult to remove a source of income from poor families before other economic opportunities have been established for them, nevertheless we are very concerned that consumers in the United States and elsewhere are being misled into believing that participants in the Partners' Agreement have actually ceased to use child labor, whereas it is evident that they have no immediate intention to do so.
- *No clear role for local activists.* Finally we think it is important that local advocacy groups like ANCE be encouraged to take on a role in "monitoring the monitors." We note that the ILO is not simply a workers' advocacy organization, but rather a tripartite institution with responsibilities not only to workers but equally to governments and to employers. We note further that local employers are a major partner to the existing agreement, and that this may have limited the scope of the program. Although Save the Children (UK) is a formal partner to the program, there appears to be no role for local labor or child welfare advocates (with the exception of Bunyad, an organization with close ties to the Pakistani government) in assessing the usefulness of the program to their goals. We suggest that there is a need for ongoing, impartial evaluation of the program by independent NGOs in order to ensure that it is of use to local communities, and to assure consumers in other countries that children do not continue to suffer from exploitation by manufacturers.

We therefore encourage the ILO monitors to investigate and to develop action plans to deal with the issues raised by the ANCE report. We note that the ILO has noted its intention to address one problem raised by the report: the finding that children may be shifted from soccer ball production to work in the equally hazardous surgical instruments industry. The ILO mid-term assessment notes that the program may be expanded to the surgical instruments industry. We encourage the program to investigate immediately the presence of children in the surgical instruments industry as a basis for developing plans to monitor this industry.

We note that the ILO mid-term assessment report itself suggested a stronger need for sanctions against non-compliant manufacturers within the program. We encourage the partners to revisit the Partners' Agreement, and to strengthen it to include sanctions against manufacturers within the program who fail to comply with its commitments to cease employing children. Furthermore, we encourage the ILO to refrain from granting any manufacturer a statement of compliance or participation in the program unless and until all child labor in the company's production has been stopped.

We encourage concerned citizens and consumers to take the following actions:

- Write to soccer ball retailers who have endorsed the program (a list follows) to insist that their manufacturers take part in this program, and that they upgrade efforts to eliminate child labor. A sample letter follows.
- Write to the ILO to encourage them to respond to the issues raised here and to strengthen and expand their monitoring program; and most importantly, to consult regularly with local activists to make sure the program is responding to their concerns. Encourage the ILO to suspend its plans to extend the program to India until it has succeeded in eliminating child labor in Pakistan. A sample letter follows.

**Sample letter to soccer ball retailers:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

With this letter, I would like to express my deep concern over the use of child labor in the soccer ball industry. In Pakistan, where most soccer balls are produced, young children are being denied education and in some cases working in debt servitude to produce soccer balls for the US market. I would like to urge you to take steps to ensure that your company is not retailing soccer balls made with child labor.

The International Labor Organization has established a program to eliminate child labor from soccer ball production in Pakistan. However, not all soccer ball manufacturers are participating in the program, and not all participating manufacturers have eliminated children from the production process. Therefore I would like to urge you to contact your suppliers in Pakistan. If they are not members of the ILO program, you should insist that they participate in the program, or else consider sourcing from a manufacturer that does participate in the program. If your suppliers do participate in the program, you should insist that they pay their full dues to the program, and also that they provide a complete list of their production facilities to the ILO inspection team.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

**Sample letter to the ILO:**

Mr. Werner K. Blenk  
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor  
International Labour Organization  
4 route des Morillons  
CH-1211  
Geneva 22 Switzerland

Dear Mr. Blenk:

I am writing to express my concern over continued use of child labor in the production of soccer balls in Pakistan. I understand that in cooperation with UNICEF, Save the Children (UK) and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the ILO has succeeded in establishing a program to monitor soccer ball production and to build education centers for Pakistani children. I support these efforts, but encourage the ILO to strengthen its existing program in Sialkot before expanding its monitoring efforts to other industries or other countries.

In particular, I am concerned that not all manufacturers participating in the program have eliminated children from the production process. The ILO should strengthen its program to contain sanctions against employers who have signed on to the program but who have not paid dues to it, or who have not provided complete lists of production facilities and allowed inspection of those facilities. Also, no participating employer should be allowed to continue outsourcing production to homes, where children may be continue to be used in stitching soccer balls.

Finally, I encourage the ILO to solicit the feedback and advice of local advocacy groups in Pakistan to continue to strengthen this program. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

**Manufacturers who have agreed to participate in the program:**

Mr. Khurshid A. Soofi  
M/s Saga Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
Toorabad, Daska Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Naeem Javed  
M/s Sublime Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
Sublime Chowk, Wazirabad Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Khawaja Zaka Uddin  
M/s Capital Sports Corp (Pvt) Ltd.  
Wazirabad Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Jahangir Iqbal  
M/s Silver Star Enterprises (Pvt) Ltd.  
Silver Star Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Muhammad Yunas Ratra  
M/s Ratra Trading Co. (Pvt) Ltd.  
Wazirabad Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Ghazanfar Ali Shabbir  
M/s Ali Trading Company (Pvt) Ltd.  
Khadim Ali Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Dr. Khurram Anwar Khawaja  
M/s Anwar Khawaja Industries  
M/s Anwar Khawaja Industries  
SIE Sialkot, Pakistan

Syed Aftab Hussain  
M/s Leatherware (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box 278  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Mazhar Ali Shabbir  
M/s Starpak Field Sports Co (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #1124, 94 Aziz Shaheed Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Shahzad Qaisar Cheema  
M/s Recto Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #20, Daska Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Majid Raza Bhutta  
M/s Fircos Industries (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box 171, Pakki Kotli, Daska Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Kh. Masud Akhtar  
M/s Forward Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
280513  
Waizabad Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Javed Amjad  
M/s Moltex Sporting (Pvt) Ltd.  
Kotli Behram  
Sialkot, Pakistan



Kh. Mushraf  
M/s KM Ashraf & Sons (Pvt) Ltd.  
Aiski Yaqoob Street  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Shahzafar Iqbal  
M/s Fasco Sports Ltd.  
10-A SIE  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Zia ur Rehman Choudhry  
M/s Fox and Associates  
PO Box #1462, Daska Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Muhammad Daud  
M/s JSD Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
Mir Mohammad Younas Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

New Port Commercial Ltd.  
PO Box #210  
Wazirabad Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Comet Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #366, Nasir Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

M/s Tajmahal Sports Co.  
PO Box 26, Pacci Kotli  
Daska Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

M/s Challenge Sports Works  
Majahid Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Abdul Ghafoor Malik  
M/s First American Corp.  
PO Box #2467  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Awan Sports Industries (Pvt) Ltd.  
Shatab Carh  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Jehangir Iqbal  
M/s Ricker Sports  
49/81-C, SIE  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Abdul Salaam  
M/s Reemasons Sports Ltd.  
Reema St. Neka Pura  
Sialkot, Pakistan

M/s Sportia Import-Export  
Nasar Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Arif Rahim  
M/s Pioneer International (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #623, Sialkot

Mr. Mohammad Istiaq Lone  
Lofty Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #2078, Daska Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Nasir Iqbal Baryar  
M/s Talon Sports  
Eiogah Rd. Hajipura  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Tariq Mumtaz  
M/s Prima Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
Wazirabad Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Daud Suleman Sheikh  
M/s Athle Sports  
Khadum Ali Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Muhammad Azam  
M/s Assac Industries  
PO Box #1068, Naveed Centre  
Kidshery Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Shahid Raza  
M/s Madrigal Sports (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #1030, Nekapura  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Ahmad J. Ahmad  
M/s Craftsman (Pvt) Ltd.  
PO Box #279  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Arfan Elahi  
M/s Great Heart & Co.

Wazirabad Road  
Sialkot, Pakistan

Mr. Ghulam Mustafa Khan  
M/s Khawaja Mir & Co.  
PO Box #1035, Mujahid Rd.  
Sialkot, Pakistan

**Retailers who have endorsed the program:**

Action and Leisure

Adidas USA  
P.O. Box 4015  
Beaverton, OR 97076-4015

Admiral

American Challenge Enterprises

American Soccer Co. (Score)

Attack

Baden

Brine  
47 Sumner Street  
Milford, MA 01757

Cambuci

Chelsea Trading Company

Cizen

Continental Sports  
Paddock, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire  
England, HD1 4SD

Diadora

DTI Soccer  
PO Box 1396  
Tacoma, WA 98401

Eiger

Franklin

Funnets

2 Extrusion Drive  
Pawcatuck, CT. 06379

High Five

Hutch

Kappa

Kendis  
3741 West Morse  
Lincolnwood IL 60645

Kwik Goal

Lanzera

Lotto

Mikasa

Mitre

Mizuno  
5125 Peachtree Industrial Blvd.  
Norcross, GA 30092

Molten

Nassau

NIKE  
One Bowerman Drive  
Beaverton, OR 97005

Nimatsu

Park & Sun

Patrick USA

Penalty

Pro-Touch

Puma

RAM Sport

Reebok  
100 Technology Center Drive

Stoughton, MA 02072

Regent

Saf-Med Products (Quattro)  
4612-L Burleson Rd.  
Austin, TX 78744

Select

Seneca  
75 Fortune Blvd, P.O. Box 719  
Milford, MA 01757

Sondico

Soccer Pal

Soccer Sport Supply

Spalding  
425 Meadow Street  
P.O. Box 901  
Chicopee, MA 01021-0901

Sportcraft

Tachikara

Talon

Three Epsilon

Umbro

Wilson Sporting Goods  
8700 West Bryn Mawr Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60631

Xara

### **Additional Resources**

Some individual retailers have undertaken their own initiatives to ensure that their products are not produced by children. An assessment of these company-specific initiatives was conducted by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs in 1997. The report, "By the Sweat and Toil of Children, Vol. IV: Consumer Labels and Child Labor" can be obtained on the DOL's website at <http://www.dol.gov/dol/ilab/public/media/reports/iclp/sweat4/index.htm> or by contacting the Department of Labor at (202) 208-4843.