

**Bal Ashram Boy wins International Children's Peace Prize  
International Recognition for 14 Year Old Boy's Struggle Against Child Slavery**



**A 14-year-old Indian boy has been awarded the International Children's Peace Prize for leading a campaign against child labour and child slavery.**

*“This is our right - that (adults) have to listen. This is children's rights. And if they are not abiding with that right, we will work harder to make them hear.” Om Prakash*

Sunday afternoon November 19, the International Children's Peace Prize was awarded to Om Prakash Gurjar in the center of Dutch Government in The Hague, The Netherlands. The fourteen-year-old boy from the Jaipur region in India, won the prize because of his brave fight against child labour and child slavery. The Children's Peace Prize was awarded by Frederik Willem De Klerk, former President of South Africa, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize together with Nelson Mandela.

Speaking through an interpreter, Om reminded adults that they have a duty to listen to children. “This is our right - that they have to listen. This is children's rights. And if they are not abiding with that right, we will work harder to make them hear.”

Om Prakash Gurjar was taken away from his parents at the age of five and went through three years of child slavery. After he was rescued by the activist of Bachpan Bachao Andolan, he was taken care of in Bal Ashram (a transit rehabilitation centre for former child labourers run by Bachpan Bachao Andolan) and was able to go to school. From the

moment Om Prakash started living in this refuge, he initiated several remarkable activities to bring attention to children's rights. For instance, he successfully fought against the unlawful contributions the poorest parents often still had to pay to let their children go to school. The result was that in the whole state of Rajasthan, education became accessible to all children. He also helped making many villages "Child Friendly", meaning that all children's rights are respected there and that child labour is not accepted. Moreover, he campaigned so that parents would get their children birth certificates, which protects their children from exploitation and gives them the right to health care and education. On his own, he arranged for more than 500 of such official documents, thus saving these children from the fate that was once his own. He says such registration is the first step towards enshrining children's rights, proving their age, and helping to protect them from slavery, trafficking, forced marriage or serving as a child soldiers.

The International Children's Peace Prize is awarded every year to an exceptional child, who has bravely devoted him- or herself to children's rights. The prize consists of a statuette, the "Nkosi" and a monetary award of \$100.000, to be used by a children's project. The statuette is named after young Nkosi Johnson, who was dedicated the prize posthumously in 2005, four years after he died of Aids at the age of 12. During his short life, he fought so bravely and very successfully for the rights of children with HIV/AIDS.

The International Children's Peace Prize was launched in 2005 in Rome by the KidsRights Foundation in conjunction with Nobel Peace Prize Laureates headed by Mikhail Gorbachev. The Prize gives a voice to the voiceless: Aids orphans, child prostitutes, child slaves, street kids and other vulnerable children get a stage to tell their stories to the world. Initiator KidsRights is active around the world supporting children who are on the edge of society.

Sunday evening November 19, Om Prakash Gurjar was honoured on Dam Square in Amsterdam during a spectacular and free open-air concert in the centre of Amsterdam. Top artists including UB40, the Sugababes, Bløf, Zucchero, Lucie Silvas, Sarah Brightman, Ilse DeLange, and many others, will perform to raise awareness for the rights of vulnerable children worldwide.

**Biography Om Prakash Gurjar**  
**Male, born 3 July 1992**

Om Prakash is born in the village of Dwarapur, in the Jaipur area, Rajasthan, India. He is 14 years old.

At the age of 5, he was taken away from his parents and became a forced labourer. For three years he faced many hardships as a child slave. He had to work all day long under bad conditions. Ploughing, sowing, harvesting, tending to cattle, handling pesticides and other chemicals was his daily routine, as were the beatings for slightest mistakes from his master. Om Prakash was given two meals a day for his work, he never got any wages.

At the age of 8 he was rescued by the activists of Bachpan Bachao Andolan and went to a re-integration center or “Bal Ashram” for liberated child slaves. He was medically checked and went through counseling. Because he was keen on studying, he was enrolled in the nearby government primary school. He was reunited with his family, but lives in the Bal Ashram. His family is too poor to take him in. He is in close contact with his parents and his 10 brothers and sisters and visits them every 6 months. All his brothers and sisters are in school. The parents do not allow them to work.

Since he lives in the Bal Ashram he has started to help other children like him. Om Prakash is a very convincing boy with a great sensitivity for injustice. He believes that education is a basic right for children and the key for a better life. He wants to make both parents and children aware of this. He started to tell the children in his home village about his own experiences as a child labourer.

In 2004 he was the head of the children’s assembly of his school. All students were asked to pay fees. Om Prakash had read that it was not allowed. To ask for money from parents who cannot afford this. The education in Government schools is supposed to be free of costs. He raised his voice against this practice and approached the sub-divisional magistrate. A petition was filed in the Jaipur Court and consequently the court passed the judgment that all the money taken from the parents should be returned to them. This was done by the school. Then the Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission took it up and ordered that no school could take money from the parents, with his case as an example. So the case of Om Prakash created a legal precedent which in turn had its effect in the whole state of Rajasthan.

Om Prakash also played an instrumental role in making his home-village a “Bal Mitra Gram” (Child Friendly Village) and since then has worked to increase the number of these Child Friendly Villages. Child Friendly Villages are villages in which children’s rights are respected, and child labour is not allowed by the villagers. Another special achievement of Om Prakash is that he mobilized more than 500 birth registrations on his own. He did so by visiting schools and villages and convincing people about the importance of birth registration: it gives the right to a name and nationality; it gives all the rights provided by the nation, the right to be free from all forms of exploitation, the right to education and the right to health care, economic privileges, like the opportunity to

work, to open a bank account, social security and a pension. And also political privileges such as the right to vote. The Birth Certificate will have a long term impact for the children and will help them access social services: such as education and healthcare, proof of age! It will help to protect the child against child labour and child marriage: making it easier to defend against abuse and child trafficking. It is the first and most basic right of the child. Om Prakash has a strong spirit and will not easily stop once he has set his mind on something. An extraordinary example of his strong will is his bicycle tour to Delhi. From 4 until 8 September 2005 the Second Children's World Congress on Child Labour and Education was held in Delhi. 40 children were selected to participate. Om Prakash was visiting his parents at that time, and was therefore not in the selected group. When he found out about it, he decided to go to the Congress by bike. This was not around the corner. He had to bike for 36 hours... He made an impressive statement at the congress about child labour.