

\*\*\*\*\*

AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 154  
June 20, 2008  
\*\*\*\*\*

## WASTEPICKER CHILDREN FACE DISCRIMINATION FROM PRIVATE SCHOOL IN INDIA



Delhi, India – In a graphic example of the deep discrimination that faces India’s urban poor, a well-known private school in Delhi has refused at the last moment to admit seven poor waste-picker children out of fear that they might carry diseases.

The children, aged 6 to 8, spent months getting ready to enter the Salwan School at Pusa Road with the encouragement of a teacher and had recently met with the school principal, when they received word that the arrangement was off.

The Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group, a Delhi-based partner of the Advocacy Project which brokered the deal on behalf of the children and their families, had harsh criticism for the school authorities.

“It is scary to find that an educational institute would do this,” said Chintan Director Bharati Chaturvedi. “It tells us how intuitive and deep the discrimination against waste-pickers runs, and the enormous barriers they face just to be treated as human beings.”

Following the rebuff, Chintan is advising the seven children – six girls and one boy – to

continue their studies in government schools, where they have faced constant taunting from teachers and other children because of their status as waste-pickers.

Waste-pickers scour through open trash bins for recyclable paper, metals, glass and plastics, which they then sell. According to Chintan, they account for almost 1 percent of Delhi's population and handle about 20 percent of the city's waste. They earn, on average, one or two dollars a day.

Although the Indian government has banned child labor, the poorest children often pick waste because they have no other means to support themselves and their families. Paul Colombini, an AP Peace Fellow who volunteering with Chintan this summer, saw this first-hand recently when he visited the Seemapuri waste-picker community.

“Whole families typically work together in the waste-picking business, and most waste-picking children are not able to attend school,” Mr Colombini wrote [in his blog](#). Even when they can attend school, wrote Mr. Colombini, the children face discrimination: “Teachers were known to not allow them in classes on the assumption that they were illegal immigrants.”

As waste-picking children move through the city collecting garbage, they are bullied into cleaning private homes, beaten by municipal sweepers and police, and sometimes even sexually assaulted, according to Chintan.

The work also exposes the children to germs, toxins, and injuries. A Chintan study found that 84 percent of waste-picker children are anemic, and that more than 22 percent suffer from four or more health problems.

Chintan tries to turn these child laborers into full-time students through a program known as “No Child in Bins.” Chintan runs four learning centers in Delhi, and reaches out to about 300 waste-picker children.

The seven children who sought admittance to the Salwan Public School had all been recruited into Chintan's learning centers from the slums of Takiya Kale Khan and Nizamuddin. They then went on to government schools, where they excelled despite the taunting, according to Ms Chaturvedi.

Their families put up with much hardship and extra expense to help them move to the next level and gain entrance to Salwan, a top private school. They were preparing to take an entrance exam when school officials abruptly changed their minds.

Ms Chaturvedi blasted the school's actions as discrimination. “In all this, one thing is clear,” she said. “If we want to get children out of work and into school, we must change attitudes, and invest in changing these.”

- Read the blogs of AP Peace Fellow **Paul Colombini** <http://advocacy.net/author/paul/>

- Read the blogs of **Mackenzie Berg**  
<http://advocacy.net/author/mackenzie/>