

Ten million slaves go missing from survey in India



New Delhi, July 24 (RHC)-- An anti-slavery group has sharply reduced its estimate of enslaved people in India from 18 million two years ago to eight million today -- a figure campaigners say is too low and could undermine efforts to fight the crime.

The Australia-based Walk Free Foundation released the 2018 Global Slavery Index last week, which said that modern-day slavery affects about 40 million people globally, including six in every 1,000 people in India.

Walk Free explained that a change in survey methodology accounted for the missing 10 million slaves reported in its 2016 index. But campaigners questioned the data, saying that the number of Indians trapped in bonded labor - which remains widespread despite a ban since 1976 - is far larger than estimated by the Global Slavery Index.

"This new data could just be interpreted as India tackling the problem well," said Venkat Reddy of the Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation, which works on child rights and slavery issues in India. "We are diluting the enormity of the problem by not giving the accurate figure."

A labor ministry official, who could not be identified as he was not authorized to speak to media, described the 8 million figure as "inaccurate, and more of an estimate." Campaigners say that more than 20 million

Indians are trapped in bonded labor, working in brick kilns, garment factories and other sites, while many more victims of modern slavery work on farms or in family homes.

The Walk Free Foundation attributed its new, lower estimate to a different method of measuring responses to its survey questions.

The 2018 index included respondents who reported experiencing slavery "on any given day" in 2016 alone, while the previous survey recorded victims who were exploited at any time during the previous five years. The new calculation also included only those who experienced slavery inside India, which eliminated anyone who suffered exploitation abroad as a migrant laborer.

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