



Human Rights Report

from Congressman Joe Pitts

MARCH 2004

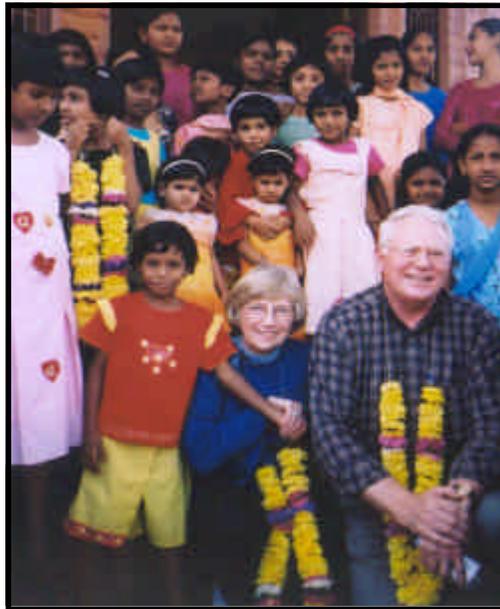
Sixteenth Congressional District of Pennsylvania

Online: <http://www.house.gov/pitts/rights.htm>

Pitts travels to Pakistan, Kashmir, and India

In January of this year, I led a congressional delegation on a visit to Pakistan, Kashmir and India in order to meet with government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and learn more about the concerns facing these nations and local communities. In Pakistan, we met with President Musharraf, Prime Minister Jamali as well as the Governor and Chief Minister of Punjab. In addition, we visited a medical clinic and the site of a new hospital in the rural village of Kotli Nunan.

As you may know, people in our District worked with a Pakistani NGO to send a roving medical unit to meet the needs of the impoverished people in the surrounding area. Each year, this medical van treats over 150,000 people, most of whom have never



Congressman Pitts and his wife, Ginny, visited this home in Bombay where girls whose parents are involved in prostitution are taken for care.

had access to health care. While in the state of Punjab, we also met with a human rights organization, the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement, that

defends the rights of religious minorities and women and children. Their work is vital to protecting the rights of minorities.

Our delegation also traveled to Azad-Kashmir and met with Kashmiri government leaders as well as leaders of the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The suffering of the Kashmiri people on both sides of the Line of Control (LOC – the line that divides the territory controlled by Pakistan and that controlled by India) is terrible. Rape is often used as a weapon of terror, people have been maimed by landmines and other artillery, and medical care for even basic needs is lacking. Currently, I am working with churches and schools in our congressional district to collect school supplies for the children in the IDP camps.

Continued on page 3...

Suffering at hands of SPDC continues

In previous newsletters, I have shared reports of the horrifying human rights violations by the Burmese dictatorship against the people. The government has engaged in a deliberate campaign to eliminate ethnic minorities. Their tactics include: a scorched earth policy, destroying entire villages along with food storage and production sources, systematic rape, the use of

humans – including women and children – as landmine sweepers, forced labor, also known as slavery, the refusal to allow the duly elected leader of the country to take office, and many other abuses have turned the country of Burma into one large concentration camp.

Christians Concerned for Burma sponsors the Global Day of Prayer to encourage all people around the world to pray for the

people of Burma. This year the day of prayer is on March 14, 2004. For more information log on to: www.prayforburma.org



Trafficking in Persons = 21st century slavery

As mentioned in previous newsletters, trafficking in persons is a growing human rights issue that affects every country in the world. Women and children are trafficked into the U.S. as well as within our nation's borders, primarily for "service" in the sex industry. While traveling in India, I visited a home outside of Bombay for the daughters of prostitutes in the Red Light District. The young women serving as prostitutes, many of whom were trafficked, want their children to have the opportunity for a different life. I applaud the organizations working on these issues and providing practical assistance to the young children who would otherwise be caught up in this terrible work. If you would like further information on Trafficking in Persons, visit one of these websites:

www.protectionproject.org
www.newlifethailand.org/welcome
www.sharedhope.org
www.jubileecampaign.org
www.csce.org
www.ijm.org

To receive this update via e-mail,
send a message to:
humanrights-pa16@ks1.house.gov.

Include the word "subscribe" in
the subject line.

Election delay continues to harm desperate refugees in Western Sahara, UN needs to act

The Sahrawi refugees, living in the harsh environment of the Sahara Desert, continue to suffer in limbo. As you may know, there is a long history of support for a free, fair and transparent referendum for the Sahrawi people to decide their own fate – whether they would like to form their own country (Western Sahara) or become a part of Morocco. Despite two carefully negotiated agreements between the Sahrawis and the Moroccans, the United Nations has failed to hold a referendum, due to the Moroccan government's stalling tactics.

The United Nations Security Council upheld the right to self-determination in July 2002 during a meeting called to discuss the conflict. During this meeting, the Security Council rejected

several proposed resolutions and clearly stated that the only viable resolution to this conflict must be based on the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination.

Sadly, the continued delay of this referendum has brought disunity among countries in North Africa and could cause instability

in this region. In addition, the delay has caused terrible suffering for the Sahrawi refugees who have lived in refugee camps since 1975, hoping that United Nations will fulfill its 1991 promise of a referendum for self-determination.



People from the 16th District worked with a Pakistani NGO to send this roving medical unit to meet the needs of the impoverished people in the surrounding area. Each year, this medical van treats over 150,000 people, most of whom have never had access to health care.

Trip to Pakistan, India, Kashmir

Continued from page 1...

If you would like to participate, please contact my Lancaster District Office at 717 393-0667 and they will send you the information about this project.

After a four day visit to Pakistan, we traveled to Bombay, Ahmedabad and New Delhi in India. While in Bombay, we visited the Red Light District and then a shelter for daughters of the prostitutes in Bombay. Many young women and girls, and some boys, are trafficked into the Red Light District and are forced into sex slavery. Others end up in Bombay through various circumstances. Often, when these women have children, the children are caught up in the chaos and suffering as well. The shelter home we visited provided a wonderful opportunity for the children of the prostitutes to experience the childhood that they had been denied. This girls home provided shelter for eighty girls between the ages of 2 and 18. There, the girls received safety, love, medical care, and education to help them develop the skills they need to live a different life than their mothers. It was a joy to visit with these girls and see their smiles and the hope in their lives. It was truly a light shining in darkness.

We also visited Ahmedabad, the capital of the state of Gujarat. In March of 2002, there were terrible attacks by Hindu extremists against Muslims in the area. Two thousand people were killed and huge numbers displaced. We visited a Muslim

community organization and were privileged to join in a ceremony in which we handed over the keys to new homes to victims who had been living in camps for two years. We also visited the burned out home of Mr. Ehsan Jaffrey, a well-respected former Member of Parliament, who had been burned to death in his home along with seventy-two women and children seeking shelter there from extremist mobs. In front of his home, women were raped and children were burned alive as attackers threw them on bonfires as the mobs rampaged through the streets. Sadly, there has been no real justice for many of the families affected by this violence.

The All India Christian Council hosted a briefing for us in which we heard from Christians, Tribal leaders, Dalits (the name given to the "untouchables," those outcasts of Indian society), Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus regarding their work together

to combat the widespread discrimination and violent attacks by Hindu extremists and to promote communal harmony.

Four states in India currently have laws on the books, which violate fundamental freedoms, most notably the freedom of religion. The unity between all these groups is powerful and has accomplished much in the effort to protect the rights of all people in India.

Our delegation also visited New Delhi and met with Indian government leaders in order to establish relationships with them to work together on addressing some of the human rights and other concerns our nations have.

*Visit my website at:
www.house.gov/pitts/rights.htm for further
information on various
human rights issues.*



Congressman Pitts tours the burned-out ruins of the home of Mr. Ehsan Jaffrey, a well-respected former Member of Parliament, who was burned to death in his home along with 72 women and children he sheltered there during riots by extremist mobs. In front of his home, women were raped and children were burned alive as attackers threw them on bonfires as the mobs rampaged through the streets.

Time for change in North Korea

Reports I have received about the North Korean government's treatment of prisoners and refugees are shocking and appalling. One young man I met, Mr. Chul-Hwan Kang, was in prison from age nine to nineteen. When North Korean authorities someone accused of a crime against the state, they typically arrest three generations of that person's family. When Mr. Kang's grandfather was arrested for spying, they also arrested and imprisoned nine-year-old Mr. Kang. While in prison, Mr. Kang, along with his fellow prisoners, suffered from extreme malnutrition, surviving on a diet snakes, rats, and frogs.

I also met with Mrs. Soon-Ok Lee who described the torture she endured at the hands of prison authorities. After severe beatings in which she lost many teeth and suffered partial paralysis in her face, she was subjected to water torture. She was forced to lie on her back and the guards inserted a special kettle spout into her mouth. The spout was made so that it expanded in her mouth, preventing her from breathing without swallowing water. The guards forced gallons of water into Mrs. Lee's body. Having swallowed so much water, she fell unconscious and her stomach became distended. The guards stopped when her body could hold no more. When she woke up they laid a board on her stomach and jumped on it, forcing the water back out of her mouth and causing her excruciating pain. She again fell unconscious. Prison officials repeated this several times to Mrs. Lee and other prisoners.

Many North Koreans attempt to escape to China, hoping to find a better life. While many of the men find jobs, most of the women are trafficked into sexual slavery. Those who are forced back across the border face brutal torture and even execution. According to the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights and The Society to Help Returnees to North Korea, North Korean women who escaped to China and who dyed their hair or wore earrings, "would undergo painful punishment after they came back to North Korea. Their heads are pounded against the wall and their earrings are wrenched out with pliers." Women who return from these beatings are barely recognizable. These reports are yet further reasons the international community needs to strongly press for change in North Korea.

CONGRESSMAN JOSEPH R PITTS
204 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON DC 20515



M.C.