



**May 2006**

**Information on the United Arab Emirates (UAE)  
Compliance with ILO Convention No.182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ratified in 2001)**

**Trafficking of children for use as camel jockeys**

Over the last decade, children from countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen have been used as camel jockeys in the UAE. The use of children as jockeys in camel racing is extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury and even death. Some children are also abused by the traffickers and employers, for example by depriving them of food and beating them. The children's separation from their families and their transportation to a country where the people, culture and usually the language are completely unknown leaves them dependent on their employers and *de facto* forced labourers.

The trafficking of children and their use as camel jockeys is prohibited by ILO Conventions 29, 138 and 182 and by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which have been ratified by the UAE. The ILO Conference Committee on the Application of Standards considered the issue repeatedly in the last five years.

**The Government's response**

In 2005, the Government of the United Arab Emirates recognised the seriousness of this problem and announced the introduction of a new law prohibiting the use of children as camel jockeys under the age of eighteen. Under this law, brought in on 5 July 2005, offenders face up to three years in prison and/or a fine of at least 50,000 dirhams (US\$13,614). This is a significant step forward and one that has been called for by human rights organisations, including Anti-Slavery International, for many years.

In 2005, the UAE Government also reached an agreement with UNICEF over the repatriation of child camel jockeys. When this agreement was announced the UAE's Ministry of the Interior estimated that some 3,000 children were being used as camel jockeys in the UAE and that around 2,800 of these children (93 per cent) were under 10 years old. The Government will provide US\$2.7 million to help with the return and reintegration of child camel jockeys in their countries.<sup>1</sup> The Government also held an amnesty for camel owners releasing underage jockeys, the deadline for which was 31 May 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> UAE supports UNICEF in safe return of camel jockeys to home countries, UNICEF, 8 May 2005, [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_26692.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_26692.html)

The new law, the repatriation agreement and related measures are all landmark events and extremely welcome. However, Anti-Slavery International has a number of concerns regarding the repatriation process and how the new law will be implemented.

### **The repatriation process**

Firstly, there is a major discrepancy between the Government's estimate of 3,000 children working as camel jockeys in the UAE, and the number of children who have been repatriated, which we understand was 1,070, as of March 2006. These figures clearly indicate that many more children continue to work as camel jockeys and still need to be identified and repatriated.

Secondly, there is a discrepancy of approximately 350 between the numbers officially repatriated to Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan and the numbers that Anti-Slavery International's NGO partners report as having been returned. While there may be a simple explanation for this, it is vital that all cases are properly tracked and documented, so that the child is protected from being re-trafficked and that their welfare needs are properly addressed. These figures are also needed so that the numbers of children repatriated can be accurately matched against those estimated to be working as camel jockeys.

Thirdly, while the UAE Government estimates that 93 per cent of camel jockeys are under 10 years old, the information received from our partners indicates that most of the children being repatriated are over 10. For example, of the 145 children documented by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association as having been repatriated between 1 August 2005 and 23 February 2006, only 42 out of 145 children were under 10 years old.

Finally, testimonies from children gathered by our partner organisations in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan suggest that some children have not been properly prepared for their repatriations. This is important because children are commonly anxious about returning to their countries and even their families, which are strange to them now, having been taken away at such a young age. For example, in Sudan, Peace and Development Volunteers, interviewed several children who have been repatriated since the new scheme began in May, but who arrived in Sudan via unofficial routes, and therefore without accessing the repatriation and rehabilitation care that the UAE has promised to provide.

It is imperative that the UAE fully documents each case and provides evidence of the standards of care being provided to these children prior to repatriation. The UAE authorities should take steps to ensure that all children receive full rehabilitative care and that every repatriation is carried out appropriately and sensitively. Rehabilitation must include: medical care for injuries suffered; psychiatric care and counselling to deal with the traumatic experiences children have been through and to help them adjust to their freedom; and bridging education to bring them up to speed with their peer group.

Steps must be taken to try to trace parents before the child leaves the destination country to confirm their origins and assess their full reintegration needs. Solutions must be found for those children whose parents cannot be traced or for whom family reunion would be inappropriate. This should help guard against further abuse and the risk of re-trafficking of children on return to their country of origin. Full child protection and rehabilitation services must also be made available in the home country. The UAE should support poorer countries of origin in providing such services, where appropriate.

The UAE Government should also provide details of how the \$2.7 million has been spent so far. For example, what proportion of this has been used to compensate child camel jockeys for the period of time that they have worked in the UAE and what assessment has the Government made of the effectiveness of rehabilitation and reintegration services provided so far.

### **Implementing legislation prohibiting the use of child camel jockeys**

The use of young children as camel jockeys had been prohibited in the UAE for decades and under numerous regulations:

- The Government reported to the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards that the employment of any child under the age of 15 has been prohibited in the UAE since 1980 under the Federal Labour Code.
- The UAE's independent Camel Jockey Association has had a rule since the early 1990s that using children younger than 14 or lighter than 45 kilograms as camel jockeys is prohibited.
- In July 2002, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of the Emirates Camel Racing Federation and Minister for Foreign Affairs, promulgated Order No.1/6/266, prohibiting children under 15 or weighing less than 45kg from being employed in camel racing. It also specified that all camel jockeys must have proof of their age through their passports and be issued with a medical certificate by the Camel Racing Federation. A fine of 20,000 dirhams (US\$5,500) will be imposed for a first offence and a second offence will lead to a ban from camel racing for one year. A prison sentence of three months along with a fine of 20,000 dirhams will be imposed for subsequent offences. The ban came into effect on 1 September 2002.

Despite all this, reports of very young children being used as camel jockeys in the UAE have been consistently documented between 1997 and 2005. Indeed the Ministry of Interior's own estimate that there were roughly 2,800 camel jockey under 10 years of age in the UAE in May 2005 shows that these laws have never been effectively implemented.

The UAE Government is proposing to use robots to replace child camel jockeys. This seems a complicated alternative to implementing fair labour conditions for adult jockeys. Furthermore, the use of robot jockeys in races will not preclude the need for people to exercise, feed and care for the camels in camps.

Indeed, Anti-Slavery International has received reports from credible sources that, while there are no longer signs of major public races involving children in the UAE, races with child jockeys are still taking place, but in smaller, camp-based venues.

The principal monitoring mechanisms designed to prevent and prohibit the practice is the Special Commission. The Commission is composed of policemen and is responsible for, amongst other things, controlling camel racing, considering the issue of child camel jockeys and responding effectively to any new problem faced in this regard.

The Government reported to the ILO Committee of Experts "that it envisages training the police and other relevant bodies on child rights as laid down in international conventions." The Government should ensure that this training take place as a matter of priority, especially with regard to child trafficking and the use of children in hazardous work. This is especially pertinent

considering a documentary broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 25 February 2003 showed police, during a camel race, escorting very young camel jockeys to a bus while other officials attempted to stop filming. This despite regulations prohibiting the use of children under 15 years of age as camel jockeys in force at the time.

The Committee of Experts (2006) has asked the Government to provide information on the activities of the Special Commission and its findings with regard to the use of child camel jockeys, their working conditions and the number of infringements reported.

This information is particularly important as prosecutions of those exploiting camel jockeys remains extremely rare. The Committee of Experts (2006) notes just five cases brought to the Courts under the July 2005 law, although cases were still being investigated at the time of writing.

Given the official statistics which indicate that there are still approximately 2,000 child camel jockeys in UAE and the expiry of the amnesty for camel owners in May 2005, the figure for prosecutions under the new law is very disappointing and raises questions as to whether existing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are adequate.

Anti-Slavery International is keen to know how the Government will ensure that the 2005 legislation is properly implemented, given the failure of previous laws and regulations which prohibited the use of child camel jockeys.

## **Recommendations**

The ILO Committee of Experts (2006) called on the Government of the UAE to “redouble its efforts to improve the situation and to take, without delay, the necessary measure to ensure that no children under 18 years are trafficked to the United Arab Emirates for labour exploitation, including camel racing.” In this context it asks the Government to provide information on police investigations and offences registered; on measures taken to ensure that prosecutions and dissuasive penalties are imposed against those exploiting children in camel racing; and on co-operation with other countries in combating child camel racing.

Anti-Slavery International would also urge the Government of the UAE to:

1. Take urgent steps to trace, rescue and provide the necessary protection and rehabilitation services for the approximately 2,000 child camel jockeys who, according to the Government’s own estimate, are still working in the UAE.
2. Provide official numbers and detailed documentation for children being rescued, rehabilitated and repatriated, to help verify that all children are receiving proper care.
3. Ensure that measures taken to rehabilitate and repatriate child camel jockeys provide children with all the psychiatric and medical care, counselling and education they require, that family tracing is carried out before repatriation, and that services are put in place to care for the child if family reunion is not possible.
4. Take urgent steps to implement the legislation prohibiting the use of camel jockeys under the age of 18, including carrying out regular unannounced inspections to identify, release and rehabilitate all child camel jockeys. This should include those camps where children have already been released to ensure that no other child camel jockeys remain there or

have been brought to the camp in question since. Child camel jockeys should also be compensated for the period of time that they have worked in the UAE.

5. Ensure that all those responsible for trafficking and employing underage jockeys are prosecuted, including Gulf citizens, and provide full statistics, broken down by year, of all the prosecutions brought, successful convictions obtained and the sentences passed against those trafficking and employing camel jockeys since 5 July 2005.
6. Ratify and implement the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime.