

Interview with Johnson and Shamim (Bonded slave labourers in Lahore Pakistan) by Anglican Aid Operations Manager Eddie Ozols in 2015. Johnson and Shamim's eldest daughter was one of the students at Miracle School.



Eddie: I'm interviewing the family of Johnson and Shamim who are bonded slaves in the brick kilns in Lahore. Good morning.

Johnson and Shamim: Good morning.

Eddie: Can you please tell me how you came to be in bonded slavery?

Johnson: We were born on the brick kiln, so we are already in slavery, but we then we took a large loan for our sister's wedding. So now we have an even bigger loan and the brick kiln owner has become harsher, and we are more and more in debt. So we have to work as bonded slaves forever, and we have no idea when we will be free.

Eddie: And how much is your debt?

Johnson: 60 000 rupees. When I was a child I was fond of education and I secretly did primary level education. So now I am good at calculations. When the owner of the brick kiln tries to trick people and trap people with the payment receipt, I keep my eyes out, so I know exactly how much is owed. This is why I know that I owe 60 000 rupees exactly, while other people just say "lots of rupees".

Eddie: How much do you earn on the brick kilns?

Johnson: I earn after 300 rupees after making 1000 bricks and from this they deduct 50 rupees to put in the trust account to pay off the loan.

The government rate is to pay 825 rupees for 1000 bricks to the brick kiln labourers. However the brick kiln owner never pays this amount. And they charge double the interest in the loan account. So people never have enough money to feed our family, to educate our children. We have nothing because they never treat us fairly.

Eddie: 300 rupees in \$3 American dollars, how long does it take you to make that many bricks?

Johnson: If we go early in the morning about 6 am and finish at 6 pm at night we can make that 1000 bricks.

Eddie: So you make 1000 bricks in a day.

Johnson: Alina [points to his eldest daughter], my wife and I. The three of us can make 1000 bricks in a day.

Eddie: So Alina is the eldest child?

Johnson: Yes.

Eddie: Alina can you tell me, are you happy making bricks?

Alina: No.

Eddie: What would you like to be doing?

Alina: I would like to study.

Eddie: Have you been at the Miracle School?

Alina: Yes.

Eddie: And why can you not go to school now?

Alina: Because I have to work on the brick kiln.

Eddie: And is that your parents' decision?

Sanam: No.

Johnson: I have a problem in my leg now so I cannot sit long. Alina can't go to school as Alina has to work in place of me.

Eddie: And how long have you been working in the brick kiln Alina?

Alina: One full year.

Eddie: What is your hope for the future?

Johnson: I have a great plan for my children. I want my children to learn and study. I want them to learn how to sew, how to use the computer. I want my children to have opportunities like other

children and have a better life. But due to the brick kiln work they cannot do this. We are burdened with the load of debts on us.

Eddie: Shamim can you introduce your children to me by name please?

Shamim: Alina [eldest girl], Sam [eldest boy], Ana [youngest girl] and Guyam [youngest boy].

Eddie: Is there anything you would like to say to people in Australia about your situation?

Johnson: I request all Australian people to please come here and see the miserable conditions in which Christians are living. We have no clothes to wear, we have no rights over here. We have nothing to feed our children or send them to school. So please come and visit, see what Christians are facing here. By the grace of God I got the chance to learn some maths and I can read my Bible and I can pray to God. That's why I am thankful to God for Miracle school that the children can go to. So I request all of you to help us, save us from this misery and please share whatever you can.

Eddie: And I understand that only Christians work on the brick kilns. Is that right?

Johnson: 80% of brick kiln slaves are Christians.

Eddie: And the others?

Johnson: The rest of the 20% are Muslims.

Eddie: Thank you so much for your time.

