

## Child Labor

By: Human Rights Watch Group

Of nearly 218 million children engaged in child labor around the world, the majority of these children are working in agriculture. Child agricultural workers frequently work for long hours in the scorching heat, hauling heavy loads of produce from the fields while exposed to harmful pesticides and dangerously sharp tools. Their work is harsh and violates their rights to health and education.

In Egypt, over one million children work each year to remove pests from cotton plants, Egypt's major cash crop. In El Salvador, children use large, sharp knives, called machetes, to cut and harvest sugar cane. In the United States, children are hired to plant, weed, and pick apples, cotton, lettuce, asparagus, watermelons, peppers, and other crops. Usually, these workers work tirelessly long hours under dangerous conditions for inadequate or no payment. In many cases, workers suffer physical and psychological abuse and are forced to work under conditions similar to slavery.

In India, as many as 15 million child agricultural workers are bonded. Bonded labor takes place when a family receives money to hand over a child, boy or girl, to an employer. In most cases, the child can never work off the debt or raise enough money for the family to buy the child back. Sometimes, bonded labor is *generational*, meaning that a child's father or grandfather was promised to an employer years earlier. The understanding is that each new generation must provide a new worker to the employer – often with no pay at all.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the number of children working in agriculture is nearly ten times more than that of children involved in factory work. Yet, children working in agriculture have received little attention. Human rights groups worldwide have been meeting to try to develop a plan to prevent entrapped children from losing their childhood, education, and other opportunities. Despite some positive work and increasing attention to this issue, governments' responses have not yet been adequate.