



## MEDIA RELEASE

Utrecht, 23 August 2017

# **New report: The Dark Sites of Granite**

## **Modern slavery, child labour and unsafe work in Indian Granite Quarries**

### **What should companies do?**

*New research, commissioned by the India Committee of the Netherlands and Stop Child Labour, reveals that modern slavery, low wages, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions are rampant in granite quarries in South India. In some quarries, especially in waste stone processing, child labour is found.*

*There is an enormous gap in working conditions between permanent workers (mainly supervisors) and casual workers (70% of the workforce). The first group receives safety equipment, insurance and an employment contract, while the casual labourers doing the dangerous manual work, lack those fundamental labour rights.*

The research shows that granite sourced from the investigated quarries is imported by 31 natural stone companies and 3 banks from *Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Spain, The Netherlands, United Kingdom* and the *USA*<sup>1</sup>. China is also a major importer, processor and re-exporter of Indian granite for the international market.

Only a few companies are member of a sustainability initiative aiming to improve working conditions in the natural stone sector, but these initiatives still hardly tackle the deplorable working conditions in granite quarries. The draft report was sent to all 34 companies and banks, but only 5 reacted.

#### **Focus on links between quarries and importers**

India is a top exporter of granite, widely used for wall and floor tiles, tomb stones and kitchen tops in western countries. Western governments are an important end-buyer of granite for buildings, pavements, public squares etc. Half of the total world exports of raw granite comes from India.

The research was conducted in 22 quarries and 6 waste stone processing sites in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka in South India. These three states account for 75% of the granite production in India. Almost half of the sampled quarries have direct linkages with foreign importers. Other quarries also produce granite for export markets, but this is traded through intermediaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Arte di Granito, Jetstone, Kerasom, Michel Oprey & Beisterveld in the Netherlands (NLD), Deisl Stein in Austria (AUT); HABU Granit-Marmor, Just Naturstein, Magna Naturstein/Magna Westfalia, M. Lampe Natursteine, Naturstein Risse and Natursteinbetrieb Schult & Co. KG in Germany (DEU); Beltrami NV and Hullebusch NV in Belgium (BEL); Beltrami UK, Blyth Marble, Grantech, KSG UK, mistermarble and Nile Trading UK in the United Kingdom (GBR); Cosentino and Levantina in Spain (ESP); General Stone Trading in Liechtenstein (LIE); Cereser Marmi, Dalle Nogare geom. Sergoil, Marimar, Marmi Bruno Zanet and Tiger Stone in Italy (ITA). Three companies from the USA are identified: Daltile Corporation, M S International and World Rocks Inc. and one in Canada (CAN): Worldwide Stone. Furthermore, 3 banks are identified: Allied Irish Banks, HSBC Bank, and Royal Bank of Scotland, all linked to the same quarry.

### **Modern slavery**

More than 70% of the workforce in granite quarries are casual labourers employed on a daily wage or piece rate basis. With wage advances of one to three months wages and high interest loans, the quarry owners are tying workers to the job. Nearly 25% of the workers are recruited by providing loans, with annual interest rates of 24% to 36%. More than half of the migrant workers owe large amounts to quarry owners or contractors. This creates debt bondage, as workers must clear the amount before they can change employer. In nine quarries this form of modern slavery is prevalent. Middlemen are recruiting worker, mostly migrants, but offer them no contract and do not respect legal requirements. Migrants constitute around two third of the total workforce in granite quarries. Workers are mostly from so-called 'lowest caste' of Dalits or Adivasi (tribal people). They are extra vulnerable due to their low social status in Indian society.

### **Health and safety in great danger**

None of the workers hired through middlemen have access to a mandatory retirement scheme nor are they covered under health insurance, while these workers are most exposed to health risks. Quarry workers face many occupational hazards and often get injured. Deadly accidents often remain unreported. Workers are also exposed to noise and dust causing work-related illnesses, like the incurable lung disease silicosis. Around 62% of the workers report that they are not receiving safety equipment such as a helmet, goggles, boots, respirator/mask and gloves, except during labour inspections.

### **Less child labour but still present**

Child labour (below 18 years) used to be rampant in granite quarries in the early 2000s, but declined because of interventions by the government, industry and civil society organisations. However, the research revealed instances of child labour in main quarry operations in seven of the sample quarries. None of the investigated sites have a prevention and rehabilitation system for child labour in place.

Child labour is still rather prominent in waste stone processing. Nearly 80% of waste stone processing is done by women and children. Children below 14 years account for nearly 3% of the waste stone processing workforce and 5% of this workforce is between 15 and 18 years old.

### **Low wages, grossly inadequate housing and no active workers' organisations**

Considering the long working hours, wages in half of the researched quarries do not meet the legal requirements. Overtime is sometimes paid by providing snacks and alcoholic drinks. Daily wages are fixed, depending on work classification, between €3.55 and €6.19 a day. Housing provided for the workers is grossly inadequate. They share small rooms, with little ventilation, water or sanitation facilities and no privacy. Half of the quarries lack clean drinking water while toilet facilities were only observed in four big quarries. In none of the researched quarries an active labour union is present.

### **Recommendations**

The report is offering recommendations to companies, sustainability initiatives, the Indian government and the European Union and its member states. Human rights due diligence by granite companies is needed to systematically eradicate rights violations, increase transparency, conduct risk assessments and implement improvement plans. The Indian government has to enforce existing labour laws and European member states should strengthen their public procurement policy (e.g. for granite).

Download here the report The Dark Sites of Granite: <http://www.indianet.nl/TheDarkSitesOfGranite.html>

Download here the summary of 8 pages: <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/TheDarkSitesOfGranite-abstract.pdf>

### **About the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN)**

The India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) is an independent non-governmental organisation campaigning and advocating on human rights issues. Central to the work of ICN are the issues of caste-based discrimination, labour rights and child labour & education.

ICN co-operates with organisations in India and elsewhere in combating discrimination, poverty, oppression, exploitation and lack of education, focusing on the role of policy makers and companies. ICN is an active member of the Stop Child Labour coalition.

### **About Stop Child Labour**

Stop Child Labour is coalition of organizations committed to child labour free production chains and aims to eliminate all forms of child labour and to ensure quality fulltime education for all children until at least the age of 15. Stop Child Labour promotes an area-based approach towards the creation of 'child labour free zones'.

Stop Child Labour collaborates with organisations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and calls on consumers, companies, governments and international organisations to join their efforts to combat child labour.