

# JVI<sup>SM</sup> JUSTICE CHRONICLES

*Stories of Freedom, Justice and Restoration*

**Murugesan's Story:** "My name is Murugesan. I was once a slave. For a long time, my wife and I were forced to work as bonded laborers in a brick kiln. We were not paid fair wages. The little bit of money we were paid was not enough for us to eat properly. Our owner would not let us leave the kiln to work anywhere else. The owner was in charge of our whole lives. We were not even let outside of the kiln without the owner's permission. We did not have any way to get out. We did not have any hope."

Hope came for Murugesan when JVI's local justice venture partner, Integrated Rural Community Development Society (IRCDS), intervened and worked with the Indian government to secure freedom for the victims. Murugesan, his wife Devyani, and several other families were set free. In freedom, Murugesan and the others saw that their lives could be different. IRCDS staff worked closely with the former slaves to ensure their transition into freedom was successful and sustainable. The families were connected with government rehabilitation benefits, jobs and education opportunities for their children.

Following his rescue, JVI partnered with IRCDS and Habitat for Humanity to build sturdy, quality houses for Murugesan and the other victims. When he was in bondage, Murugesan felt like he had no one to turn to. With the support of IRCDS and those who have helped secure his freedom, he now feels like he has the ability to speak for himself.

Building his house with Habitat, JVI, and IRCDS was a significant step for Murugesan to ensure that he and his family remain free for generations to come. The families had been living in huts made of straw and mud that left them vulnerable to rains, theft and displacement. Murugesan's new house provides the former slave with shelter, financial security, and stability within the community.

When the JVI-sponsored houses were constructed in 2010, Murugesan stood confidently in front of his new home. Flanked by his wife Devyani and their three children, Murugesan stated with a quiet, unmistakable joy:

*"Now that we have a house, we can have peace at home. My children can study and we have enough food to eat. We have hope. We can even grow and be like other people in our village. We can reach a better status."*

JVI continues to explore opportunities to partner with IRCDS and other justice ventures in south India to secure freedom, justice and restoration for victims of bonded labour and other forms of human trafficking.

**Captions:** (top) Murugesan and Devyani with their newly-dedicated home. (bottom) Murugesan and his wife stand together with other former slaves and JVI's Jaisankar Sarma, Saro Sarma and Santosh Sankaran.

