

# Resolution on the plight of Nepali-speaking--refugees from Bhutan

## The European Parliament,

- A. deeply concerned at the plight of some 86,000 mostly Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan who are currently in refugee camps in eastern Nepal and of 15 000 others dispersed in neighbouring areas of Nepal and India,
  - B. aware that Bhutan's policy of 'national integration', on the basis of western Bhutanese (Drukpa) traditions and culture, led to a campaign, begun in 1990, of suppression of Nepali cultural expression in Bhutan, revocation of citizenship and intimidation, arrests and sometimes torture of ethnic Nepalese, resulting in a large-scale exodus to Nepal of these people,
  - C. disturbed that, according to a recent report of the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, the conditions in the refugee camps have deteriorated, especially with regard to medical care and education, and that certain of the aid agencies, including the UNHCR, are now scaling down or withdrawing their assistance to these camps,
  - D. whereas several Bhutanese refugee groups organized peaceful demonstrations to protest against this unacceptable situation and undertook a march from Nepal to Bhutan across Indian territory,
  - E. whereas, according to a report by Amnesty International, several demonstrators were arrested by the Indian authorities in mid-January and released after judicial verifications, but whereas several of them are soon to be brought before the Silguri court,
  - F. noting that the movement to bring about democratic reform in Bhutan has been largely based in southern Bhutan,
1. Calls on the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal, in cooperation with all other parties involved, to reach an agreement which will allow the early, voluntary repatriation of these Bhutanese refugees to their country of origin;
  2. Considers that the Indian authorities must take full account of the humanitarian situation of the Bhutanese refugee in Nepal and acquit all persons arrested during the peaceful protest demonstrations;
  3. Calls on the Government of Bhutan to make practical preparations for the UNHCR- supervised return of these refugees, and to safeguard the rights of minorities on its territory;
  4. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Governments of the Member States to provide assistance to the refugees in eastern Nepal (some of whom have been denied official refugee status), both via the Government of Nepal and via the aid agencies operating in the field;
  5. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Governments of the Member States, in liaison with the UNHCR, to discuss with the Government of Bhutan proposals for the provision of assistance for the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of these refugees in their former homes in Bhutan;
  6. Notes that, in this connection, most, of these refugees would appear to qualify under international law as being genuine citizens of Bhutan and considers that Bhutan's Citizenship Act of 1985 may need to be modified as a result;
  7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments of the member States, the Governments of Bhutan, Nepal and India and the Secretariat of SAARC.

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**  
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The Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights recalls the Chairperson's statement made at its fiftieth session (E/CN.4/1999/4-E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/45, Chap. IV, para. 41), in which the Sub-Commission expressed its deep concern over the human rights situation of persons mainly of Nepalese ethnicity who claim to be refugees from Bhutan and who during the past seven or eight years have been living in camps in Nepal administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In that statement, the Sub-Commission called on the Governments concerned to negotiate in good faith towards a peaceful solution consistent with international human rights standards; to set up an impartial verification process to verify the origin and nationality status of those who assert they are refugees and to negotiate the voluntary return under conditions of safety and dignity of those entitled to return.

The Sub-Commission notes with regret that no progress has so far been made in the resolution of the refugee situation, but expresses its great satisfaction that dates now have been set, in agreement between the two Governments concerned, for such negotiations to be held : from 13 to 16 September 1999. It notes with appreciation the expressed intention of the two Governments to seek a solution to this problem and their willingness to extend their cooperation to the Sub-Commission by providing information on initiatives taken to proceed with negotiations.

The Sub-Commission reiterates its hope that the meeting will result in an agreement on criteria to be applied and that an effective and impartial verification process will be set in motion at the earliest possible time; that the economic, social and cultural rights of those who are entitled to return are ensured by the Government of Bhutan and that, similarly, the economic, social and cultural rights of those who are not entitled to return to Bhutan are ensured by the Government of Nepal or that of any other country to which they belong.

It reiterates its suggestion to the two Governments that they avail themselves of technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees so as to facilitate a fair and lasting resolution which takes into account representations on behalf of the displaced population and the principles of international law relating to non-discrimination, the right to return, the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of one's nationality and the reduction of statelessness.

The Sub-Commission hopes that this refugee problem can be solved within the next year and decides to review at its next session the progress made.