

Seminar on the Right to Repartition of Bhutanese Refugees

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People's SAARC 2010

Seminar on the Right to Repartition of Bhutanese Refugees: Sharing testimonies by Bhutanese refugees with south Asian representatives

25-26 April 2010, Birtamod, Jhapa, Nepal

Organized by: South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and the Bhutanese Refugees Repatriation Committee

We, more than 50 Bhutanese refugees representing all seven refugee camps located in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal and the members of SAAPE from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, and peasant organisations, academia, women associations and social movements from different countries of South Asia have gathered here in Birtamod, Jhapa on April 25, 2010 on the occasion of People's SAARC 2010 to defend the rights of Bhutanese refugees. As an extension of People's SAARC 2010 Delhi, India, this one day seminar has come up with the following realizations and demands: During our visit to the camps we found the citizens of Bhutan living under total deprivation and in dehumanized conditions.

This is a situation which must not be allowed to continue and demands immediate all round intervention to ensure that all basic entitlements are made available without any further delay or prevarication,

1. Thousands of Bhutanese citizens have been evicted from their homeland by way of political victimization and intolerance for the voice of democratic dissent and forced to live as political refugees on the borders of India and Bhutan and the refugee camps of Nepal;
2. This illegality and immorality have been perpetuated for more than 18 years against the norms and standards of international law and violation of human rights;
3. It is high time for south Asian countries to bring pressure on the government of Bhutan to allow the rights of the refugees to return to their homelands and to facilitate their repatriation with full dignity, honour and the right to equality and full participation as citizens of Bhutan;
4. We, on behalf of people of the South Asian nations, demand that this issue be taken up on the agenda of official SAARC and an urgent solution found to this aggravated humanitarian emergency prevailing along the borders of south asia, even as the heads of the governments engage in empty tokenism in the capital of Bhutan, thus bestowing legitimacy to an anti-people and anti-democratic government;
5. We also demand an immediate end to the suppression of the democratic rights of these refugees and the gross violation of their civil and political rights;

6. We demand for the formation of South Asia Refugee Commission within the framework of SAARC to engage and take care of the refugee problems in the region;
 7. We take note of the inadequacy of third country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees;
 8. We urge the South Asian governments, particularly India, Bhutan and Nepal to address the Bhutanese refugee's demands to return to their homeland. We request international community to facilitate the process of repatriation to their homelands;
 9. We urge that all South Asian nations follow the lead of Afghanistan and ratify the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and enact suitable legal framework to address the problems of the refugees; and
 10. Finally we commit ourselves to continue activities to make South Asia a refugee free region. We believe in solidarity, fraternity and mutual respect for all.
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