

Human rights: Bhutanese refugees in Nepal B5-0673, 0712, 0719, 0727 and 0740/2000

► European Parliament resolution on Bhutanese refugees in Nepal

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 14 March 1996 on the plight of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan⁽¹⁾,

A. having regard to the visit to Nepal from 21 to 22 April 2000 by the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with the countries of South Asia and the SAARC, which incorporated an on-the-spot assessment of the continuing plight of the almost 98 000 Bhutanese refugees who are accommodated in seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal,

B. recalling that both Bhutan and Nepal have given assurances to the European Parliament that bilateral negotiations would be speedily concluded and that actual verification in the camps would begin by July 2000,

C. aware that the growth in the population of Bhutanese refugees, which is a natural process, means a demand for resources including additional huts and associated facilities in already cramped camps and that, similarly, food and non-food supply is another area in which demand continues to rise each year,

D. conscious of the vital role played by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UNHCR, who are assisting the refugees, and that the European Union and other donors have provided funds for the two organisations, and welcoming the fact that the EU has also been supporting the refugees and refugee-affected areas through NGOs,

E. stressing that, while the EU remains one of the major donors, both the UNHCR and the WFP are finding it increasingly difficult to raise funds to run the camps and that in recent months the WFP has been facing the real and very serious possibility of a future food shortage, and expressing disquiet, furthermore, that donors are more and more concerned at the lack of progress being made,

F. welcoming the talks on the problem of the Bhutanese refugees held by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, with the Bhutanese and Nepalese authorities during her visit to these countries at the end of April and beginning of May 2000,

1. Reiterates its call to the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal, in cooperation with all other parties involved, to reach an agreement which will allow the early and voluntary repatriation of these Bhutanese refugees to their country of origin;

2. Regrets the officially instituted and illegal occupation of the homes and lands of those who have been driven out, as this complicates possible future repatriation and

makes a just settlement more difficult to achieve;

3. Welcomes the latest round of bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan in Thimphu in May this year; also welcomes the fact that Nepal has accepted the UNHCR compromise on the crucial definition of the "family" unit for verification purposes and calls on the Bhutanese authorities to accept the UNHCR compromise so that the commitment to field verification for the early and time-bound repatriation of the refugees can begin immediately;

4. Welcomes the Bhutanese authorities' commitment, given to the UNHCR High Commissioner for Refugees during her visit to Bhutan and Nepal, to resolve the refugee issue and to display the flexibility necessary for an early solution to the problem of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal;

5. Considers that international donors should make sufficient funds available to permit the running of the camps during the negotiation and verification process and greatly appreciates the direct support for the camps which, so far, has cost USD 92 million, and calls on the donors, furthermore, to insist that the Bhutanese Government facilitate a rapid repatriation of the refugees;

6. Recognises the tremendous goodwill of Nepal in accepting the refugees who are the victims of arbitrary deprivation of nationality and forcible eviction and who came to Nepal through India, which consistently refuses to help in resolving the repatriation issue by pretending that it is a bilateral issue of concern only to Bhutan and Nepal;

7. Considers that the Indian authorities should take full account of the humanitarian situation of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and should take political initiatives in order to support the solution of the problem, while noting that there are 25 000 Bhutanese refugees in India;

8. Calls for and encourages all interests, including international donors, to contribute to finding an early and permanent solution bearing in mind that almost 98 000 people have been denied their human rights for the last eight years;

9. Welcomes the release of Mr Tek Nath Rizal and 200 other prisoners as a positive indication of Bhutanese goodwill but at the same time regrets the lack of progress in other areas;

10. Welcomes the positive steps in defining the database and procedural aspects for the verification process and points to the important role that can be played by the UNHCR in facilitating the practical implementation of the process;

11. Notes with satisfaction that the Prime Ministers of Bhutan and Nepal will meet very soon in New York and will also meet Mrs Ogata, High Commissioner for Refugees; hopes that these meetings will produce a final political settlement of this long-standing question; if not, calls on the Council to initiate meaningful discussions and consider financial support aimed at encouraging all parties involved to take the necessary political initiatives which will result in a final and durable solution at the highest political level;

12. 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,

the secretariat of the SAARC, the WFP and the UNHCR.

(1) OJ C 96, 1.4.1996, p. 296.