

## PROTEST RALLY IN NEPAL FOLLOWS BEATING OF 60 DALIT TRYING TO WORSHIP IN A HINDU TEMPLE

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AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 82, September 21, 2006

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Kathmandu, Nepal and Washington, DC: Around 60 Dalit have been hurt by Hindu protesters after trying to break centuries of taboo and discrimination and worship in a temple where they have long been refused entry.

The violence occurred on Sunday in the village of Silgadhi, Doti district, and is one of the most serious confrontations since protests sidelined the monarchy earlier this year. Untouchability is banned under Nepal's constitution, and the newly-restored parliament has declared Nepal a secular state. But the caste system is fiercely defended in villages by those who view Dalit rights as a threat to their privilege.

According to the Jagaran Media Center (JMC), a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), Dalit fled for their lives following the clashes and sought refuge outside the village. "We strongly appeal for their protection and to save their lives," says the latest JMC bulletin.

Police also arrested more than 50 Dalit activists Wednesday for holding a rally outside Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's house to protest the attacks. The activists attempted to submit a letter to the prime minister demanding action be taken against the upper-caste people who beat up the Dalits.

The attacks have also caused widespread concern among Dalit outside the country. Prakash Nepal, from the Nepali-American Society for Oppressed Community (NASO), a leading lobby organization for Dalit in North America, described the attacks as "shocking" and "barbaric."

The JMC reports that tension has been rising in Silgadhi since Dalit women were "abused" by the priest at the Shivalaya temple on August 26 as they tried to worship during a religious festival.

Dalit activists and civil society groups then met with the political parties, Maoists and police and drew up an agreement allowing Dalit to worship at the temple of Saileswori. The District Administrative Officer warned that anyone trying to prevent them from entering would be prosecuted.

In spite of this, a mob attacked the worshippers as they tried to enter the temple and then went on a rampage in the village, burning two Dalit organizations. Five policemen are among those reported injured. Fifteen of the injured are reported to be in serious condition.

The role of the Maoists is likely to be watched carefully in the weeks to come. During the war, Maoists outlawed untouchability in many regions under their control and applied rough justice to

those who ignored their edicts. The Silgadhi protestors have clearly not been deterred by the Maoists' support for the government in this crisis.

An AP mission to Nepal last October 2005 profiled the uphill efforts of Dalit to exercise their right to worship in Eastern Nepal. AP also sent two interns from Georgetown University to work with JMC this summer. AP is currently seeking to strengthen JMC's network of community-based reporters who monitor human rights in the villages.

- Read the [JMC e-bulletin](#)
- Read the blogs of AP interns [Nicole](#) and [Stacey](#).