
AdvocacyNet
News Bulletin 139

ADVOCATES ON WHEELS TAKE THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST DISAPPEARANCES TO THE NEPAL COUNTRYSIDE

Kathmandu, January 21, 2008: Human rights advocates in Nepal have launched a nationwide movement to pressure the government to resolve hundreds of disappearances - on bicycles.

The unusual campaign was launched on January 15 by 15 volunteers from the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), a network of human rights groups and a partner of the Advocacy Project (AP). AP is sponsoring one of the cyclists, Ramesh Adhikari, at a cost of \$376.

The wheel-born advocates plan to spend a month cycling the length and breadth of Nepal, meeting with relatives of those who disappeared. Along the way, they will gather information about unregistered cases, hold press conferences, and collect signatures for a petition to be handed into the government. The cyclists will also present a memorandum to the chief political officer in each of the districts visited.

According to a COCAP press release, the campaign will press the government to prosecute those responsible, provide compensation for relatives, and ratify the international convention on disappearances. The cost will be borne by local donations, to “ensure local ownership of a campaign which is both urgent and touches the heart of the people from across the nation.”

The campaign is particularly keen to engage with relatives of the disappeared, who have proved to be powerful advocates in other countries. Relatives from Argentina and Chile played a key role in the establishment of a UN working group on disappearances in 1979.

Nepal is the latest young democracy to be haunted by the fate of those who disappeared during past conflict or dictatorship. The issue is particularly troubling at a time when Nepalis are preparing for go to the polls to elect a Constituent Assembly in April.

Most of the disappearances occurred between 2001 and 2005 as a result of the King’s repressive rule and the armed Maoist insurgency. At one stage, Nepal accounted for the highest number of new disappearances reported to the UN working group, which paid a special visit to the country in December 2004.

By the end of 2006, 510 cases had been reported to the UN group and 304 of them remain unresolved. In Nepal itself, the Red Cross lists 818 names that are still

unaccounted, but even the statistics are a matter of dispute. In an email from Nepal, Celayne Shrestha, a COCAP volunteer, said that some organizations had refused to provide COCAP with information.

On November 21, 2006 the seven major political parties and the Maoists signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement that included a call to end impunity for human rights abuses and set up a special commission to investigate disappearances and provide financial assistance to relatives. Six months later the Supreme Court felt obliged to remind the government of this commitment. Still, no action has yet been taken.

This is largely put down to foot-dragging by the Maoists, who are blamed for some of the disappearances. When they were put under pressure, the Maoists resigned from the coalition government in September, causing the postponement of elections.

There may be some concern that forcing the issue now might also complicate the run up to the April elections. But COCAP feels this is outweighed by the damage caused by inaction, and that disappearances will “continue to act as an obstacle to sustainable peace.”

Among those publicizing the campaign is Yogendra Milan Chhantyal, COCAP’s coordinator in the district of Baglung, who launched an innovative human rights radio program from Baglung FM, last summer with help from Tassos Coulaloglou, an AP Peace Fellow.

Mr Chhantyal featured the disappearances campaign in his 24th program on Sunday. AP has supported his radio project with \$600, and is posting programs on the AP site as they become available.

- The COCAP volunteers need support. To sponsor a volunteer, donate \$376 through the [AP website](#). 100% of the donation will be transferred directly to a volunteer.
- For more information and a list of the volunteers, email Celayne Shrestha: emailmcelayne.hs@googlemail.com
- For more information on the [Baglung radio project](#), to listen to the programs, and to donate, click [here](#).

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