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## INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN NEPAL FACE VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

Kathmandu, Nepal: A shocking new report from the [Jagaran Media Center \(JMC\)](#) in Nepal finds that Nepalis who marry outside their caste risk social exclusion and even violence, particularly from their own families. This severely reinforces the caste system in Nepal, and impedes social mobility.

The finding is based on an investigation by six Dalit reporters, who interviewed around 200 married couples in six districts of Nepal late in 2008. Their reports have been edited by the [JMC](#) in Nepal and posted online by The Advocacy Project (AP) in Washington.

Inter-caste marriage is the first issue to be featured by JMC as part of a new project. Starting this month, JMC reporters throughout Nepal will investigate a practice which contributes towards caste discrimination. Every three months, their information will be distributed by e-bulletin and by radio in Nepal and abroad, and used by JMC and its allies to lobby for change. Future issues will report on such issues as forced labor, water, education, political participation and Dalit culture.

Dalit make up 22 percent of the population in Nepal. But so few marry across caste lines that only 20 inter-caste married couples were identified in Doti province. According to JMC, mixed marriages face four types of abuse:

- Harassment: Inter-caste couples face such harassment that they often end up living in seclusion from friends and neighbors.
- Forced separation: Parents of non-Dalit often intervene to prevent inter-caste relationships. Some go as far as to forcibly separate their child from a Dalit partner.
- Displacement: Inter-caste couples are forced to leave their village and even flee the country, to escape from parents and family.
- Institutional discrimination: Inter-caste couples and their children face severe discrimination from authorities and officials. They are regularly denied citizenship, without which they are unable to vote and move to another village. Also, their children cannot obtain education.

In spite of the general hostility towards mixed marriages, some local government officials actively try to prevent discrimination. In Morang District, Madan Acharya, a District Administrator Officer, said that the administration is ready to help couples who request a court marriage. So far, his district has provided fifteen couples with 5,000 Nepalis (\$65) to help them start a new life and pursue higher education. The police in Morang are also ready to punish officers found guilty of discrimination. Such support is available throughout Nepal, but very few

couples know of it.

JMC will now use the information from its reporters to lobby for change in Nepal and with allies abroad. Working with local Dalit advocacy groups in the districts, JMC will help inter-caste couples to understand their rights and report abuses to local officials. Couples that brave intimidation, or families that provide support to mixed marriages, will be encouraged with letters from abroad and profiled in the local media.

In Kathmandu, JMC will contact Dalit MPs in the Constituent Assembly and press for caste discrimination to be declared a crime against humanity in the new Constitution, which is currently being drafted. JMC will also urge Dalit MPs to follow up in their constituencies. JMC hopes to bring at least one test case before the Nepali courts in 2009.

JMC is asking advocates in North America and Europe to distribute this e-bulletin widely, and send letters of support to married couples in Nepal and local officials who make inter-caste marriage possible.

- Visit [JMC's website](#)
- Visit the AP website to learn more about the [campaign to expose Dalit discrimination](#).