

NEPAL MAOISTS ACCUSED OF BEATING DALIT WOMEN TO FORCE THEM OUT OF PROSTITUTION

AdvocacyNet

News Bulletin 68, June 16, 2006

Kathmandu and Washington DC, June 16, 2006: At a time when Nepal's democrats are seeking to avoid a confrontation with the Maoists, a leading Dalit rights organization has accused Maoists of beating up 16 Dalit women, including one pregnant woman, from the Badi sub-caste. Badi women are known for engaging in prostitution (pesha).

The charge is made in the latest e-bulletin from the Jagaran Media Center (JMC), a partner of the Advocacy Project (AP), following an on-site investigation in the village of Mudha Bazar. JMC is demanding that the Maoists apologize publicly and take "strong action against the perpetrators." (See **JMC E-bulletin # 17**)

JMC's forthright criticism comes as the new democratic government is treading carefully in dealing with the Maoists, so as not to disrupt the current peace talks. The government has released more than 1,000 detained Maoists since the talks began.

JMC is seeking to better protect Dalit in areas controlled by the Maoists. With this in mind, the group is applying a carrot-and-stick approach - seeking to hold the Maoists to their own promises while engaging them in a dialogue. The 12-point agreement, signed between the Maoists and government on November 25 last year, committed both sides to "fully honor the values and ideals of human rights."

Suvash Darnal, chairman of JMC, told AP that JMC was not "confronting" the Maoists, and that he can talk freely with them about human rights issues. He described one leading Maoist contact as "polite and responsive." Mr. Darnal added that he cannot engage the Nepalese army in a dialogue in similar situations.

Meanwhile, other human rights organizations are considering whether and how to engage the Maoists over their abuses during the long war. The last point of the November 25 agreement calls for human rights abusers to be brought to justice. Charan Prasain, president of the Nepal Human Rights Organization (HURON) said much more attention had been focused on violations by the government, particularly disappearances, than by the Maoists.

The recent incident sheds light on the way that the Maoists operate in areas under their control. According to JMC, a group of eight Maoists, including three women, arrived in the village of Mudha Bazar late on May 10, and publicly accused 16 Badi women of prostitution.

The Badi women were made to stand in front of the village Simal tree where they were beaten with wooden sticks and denied water. The women asked not be beaten on their arms because of family planning implants, but were ignored. Thirteen out of the 16 victims needed medical attention.

JMC sent a journalist to the village to investigate the alleged incident, but no one would speak until some of the same Maoists happened to return to invite the villagers to a gathering the following day.

Commander Tufaan, the leader of the Maoists, admitted that his group had beaten the women for “their goodwill.” He said that the Maoists had asked the women not to engage in prostitution and to leave the area, but that they had not done so. “They got hands and legs which work. They should be able to choose alternate occupation(s).”

JMC is currently investigating reports that the Maoists have offered land and a tractor to the Badi women if they give up prostitution, Mr. Darnal said.

The Advocacy Project has sent two Georgetown graduates, Stacey Spivey and Nicole Cordeau, to intern with JMC this summer. AP visited several communities in Western Nepal in 2005, including the Badi women of Mudha.

* For the JMC website visit <http://www.jagaranmedia.org.np/>

* For AP’s blogs on the Badi women of Mudha, visit http://advocacynet.org/the_badi_women_of_mudha/

* For Stacey’s blogs, visit <http://advocacynet.org/author/stacey-spivey/>

* Nicole’s blogs, visit <http://advocacynet.org/author/nicole-cordeau/>

The Advocacy Project is based in Washington D.C. Phone +1 202 758 3328. To visit the AP website for information about our current projects and to make a donation online, please go to: <http://advocacynet.org/>. For questions or comments about the AP and its projects, please email us at dcoffice@advocacynet.org.