

DALIT DIASPORA CALLS FOR 20 PERCENT DALIT REPRESENTATION IN NEW NEPAL GOVERNMENT

AdvocacyNet

News Bulletin 80, September 1, 2006

Washington, DC: Dalit advocates from among the Nepali diaspora in the United States have criticized Nepal's draft interim constitution because it does not endorse affirmative action on behalf of Dalit.

The criticism has been leveled by the Nepali-American Society for Oppressed Community (NASO) against the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which presented its proposals to the Nepali government and Maoists on August 25.

NASO had earlier sent an open letter to the Committee demanding that Dalit be guaranteed 20 percent of the positions in the government and in all state bodies, proportionate to the Dalit population in Nepal.

The proposal was ignored by the committee, which declined even to respond to the NASO letter. The Committee's draft makes no specific provision to include Dalits in political life.

Contacted by The Advocacy Project (AP), Prakash Nepal from NASO said that in the absence of special provisions, Dalit will almost certainly not be elected to the Constitutional Assembly when elections are held next April, or in subsequent parliamentary elections, because Dalit do not hold a majority in any region of the country. Mr. Nepal told AP that NASO will now lobby hard with the US Congress to push for quotas before the Assembly elections.

NASO has also called on aid agencies and the Nepal government to allocate 20 percent of their budgets for Nepal to Dalit. Mr. Prakash said that the goal is to "eliminate the gap between the lower and upper castes," adding that this should be seen as a temporary measure that would last until a "casteless society" is created in Nepal.

The reaction of some aid agencies has been positive. Dr. Prasenjit Khatri, the policy and advocacy advisor for Oxfam in Nepal, said that all of Oxfam's programs focus on gender and social inclusion and agreed that aid should go to the most "marginalized Dalit." Even a 20 percent quota was "not enough," he said.

An official from ActionAid said that the agency's program in Nepal centers around 10 minority groups. While Dalit receive roughly 14 percent, he said, the agency might agree to increase this to 20 percent.

But an official from the World Bank told AP that the Bank is opposed to such affirmative action because it does not want to "reward" certain groups over others. An official at UNICEF also

expressed concern that a 20 percent quota would discriminate against other needy sectors of the population that do not have the Dalit contacts or ability to lobby.

While the Dalit population in North America is small - estimated in the hundreds - NASO's members are influential in the Nepali diaspora. NASO also has considerable lobbying power, given its proximity to the US Congress and multilateral organizations.

Meanwhile, in another sign of the internationalization of Dalit advocacy, Pratik Pande, from the Jagaran Media Center (JMC), recently told the UN Working Group on Minorities in Geneva that the government of Nepal must ensure proportional representation for Dalit and other minorities in the new democratic Nepal.

This was first time that JMC, a partner of AP, had addressed the UN directly. JMC is also pressing the UN Development Program to use its aid to ensure that Dalit do not face discrimination at water taps in western Nepal.

Two AP interns – Nicole Cordeau and Stacey Spivey – have been working with JMC this summer, and another AP intern – Lori Tomoe Mizuno – is working with the [Collective Campaign for Peace \(COCAP\)](#) in Kathmandu. One of their tasks has been to collect information, which can be disseminated by AP and used by advocates like NASO outside the country.

- Read 2006 AP intern [Lori's blogs](#)
- Read 2006 AP intern [Stacey's blogs](#)
- Read 2006 AP intern [Nicole's blogs](#)