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Families of the Disappeared in Nepal Take their Case to the UN



The UN working group on disappearances with the Bardiya Memorial Quilt, made by relatives of the disappeared in Nepal.

The National Network of the Families of the Disappeared and Missing Nepal (NEFAD) has asked the United Nations for help in unblocking the deadlock over transitional justice in Nepal.

Speaking on behalf of NEFAD in Geneva last Tuesday, The Advocacy Project invited the [UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) to visit Nepal and

update the Group's estimate on the number of Nepalis who disappeared during the conflict (1996-2006).

NEFAD represents over 1,000 families and is headed by Ram Bhandari, whose father disappeared in 2001.

The UN Group has received notice of 694 disappearances in Nepal since it was established in 1980 - one of the highest numbers reported from any country. But a government-created commission on disappearances in Nepal has collected files on 2,518 cases and NEFAD feels that this is much closer to the real figure.

NEFAD's request comes at a critical time in Nepal, where the government has embarked on a series of moves to neutralize all transitional justice initiatives.

The government is seeking to reverse a landmark 2015 ruling against impunity by the Supreme Court; draft a law that would weaken the independent national human rights commission; control the membership and terms of two commissions that are investigating disappearances and war crimes; and exploit divisions between advocates for the families.

The United Nations system, together with donors and human rights organizations, has boycotted all transitional initiatives in Nepal because one of the two commissions - on truth and reconciliation - has a mandate to offer amnesty to those who committed crimes during the conflict. This has been declared illegal by the Supreme Court and would run counter to international law.

NEFAD also opposes an amnesty, but Mr Bhandari feels that family members have other practical needs which may require working with the government. These include economic reparations, activities to commemorate the disappeared and even seeking political representation on local councils which have been strengthened under Nepal's new constitution.

Mr Bhandari described NEFAD's approach as "critical engagement" and expressed the hope that the UN Group can offer practical advice and support. The five Group members are from Argentina, Canada, Lithuania, Morocco and South Korea. Two lost relatives to disappearances in their own countries. A third served six years in jail as a prisoner of conscience.

Meanwhile, another UN investigator is exploring ways to improve reparations for victims of human rights abuse.

NEFAD feels this could also be relevant to Nepal. The government gives \$10,000 to each family of the disappeared. This is generous compared to other countries, but the policy has been applied in an ad hoc manner and many families have been left out.

* [Watch the Bardiya Memorial Quilt being made.](#)

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