

Memorandum hand over program

14 August, Nepal

Background:

Nepal is a multi-religious, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural country. The diversity of caste, religion, language and culture provides a unique identity to Nepal. The unique culture and traditions of Nepal has given the country global recognition. However, a dark side of the culture also exists. A number of improper practices prevail in the name of culture and customs. These improper cultural practices and evil customs, including the dowry system, witch-hunting practices, untouchability, *deuki pratha*, *chhaupadi pratha*, prevailing within society and lead to violations of human rights. Such practices have given a place for inhuman practices within Nepali society, resulting in physical and mental torture and sometimes even leading to death. The economically poor, Dalits, and single women are most commonly victimized by such improper cultures and practices.

Various social movements against caste and gender discrimination are present in Nepal. However, it is unfortunate that social movement against the improper culture and practices are not observed. There is a great deal of hypocrisy within elite groups and political leaders when it comes to the maintenance of culture and traditions that harm human rights. On one hand, they denounced violence based on evil customs; while on the other, they support such practices in the name of cultural identity. In fact, it is difficult to go against any culture or practices in Nepal, even if they are improper and harmful to human dignity. In this context, the steps taken by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, and the National Women Commission is laudable. In 2011, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare identified 57 improper cultural practices and drafted a bill against the discrimination of women in the name of tradition, customs and social norms. Similarly, with a view to curtail witch –hunting practices, the National Women Commission drafted a bill against witch-hunting practices.

It is a difficult task to bring about change and prevent the practice of improper cultural practices because superstition is deeply rooted within Nepali society. A bill has been drafted against witch-hunting practices and the discrimination of women in the name of tradition, customs and social norms. The initiation of a social movement against violence based on improper customs is a requirement of the time. The initiation of the program will put pressure on the concerned authority to solve the problem.

Objectives:

- To pressurize stakeholder to put an end to violence based on improper cultural practices
- To create a national level discourse on improper customs and practices
- To create public awareness

Participants:

Altogether, there were 900 participants; comprising of youth, human rights activists, women's rights activists and social workers. There was also a representation of local political leaders present. Members of the media, including different electronic and printed mediums, were also present at the program. The program was conducted in seventeen different districts of the Terai region from eastern to western Nepal.

Proceedings:

The program was divided into three parts: rally, memorandum hand over to CDO and corner meeting (*konsabha*). The program was organized by each district committee of the 'National Alliance Against Violence Based on Evil Customs' (*kuritijanya himsa antya: ratriya sanjaal*), and promoted by the Society for Humanism (SOCH) Nepal. The program begun with a rally, subsequently the memorandum was handed over to the CDO of respective districts. The program ended with *konsabha*, where speeches were delivered by local rights activists and journalists focusing on the significance and importance of a campaign against violence based on evil customs. The respective district coordinator thanked all participants for making the program successful. Finally, the program was concluded with a vow to work together for the campaign.

Conclusion:

The program was successfully conducted in different seventeen districts of the Terai region. It worked as a common platform for like-minded individuals on the subject matter to join up campaign. The program successfully obtained its objective to pressurize the stakeholder to end violence based on improper culture and practices. Furthermore, the program worked to increased local attention and attraction to the evils and violence caused by improper cultural practices.

Annexure

Glimpses of the program



