

**REPORT**

**OF**

**The National Conference**

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**The National Alliance to End Evil Customs Based on Violence**  
**National conference**

**Organized By SOCH Nepal**

**September 28-29, 2013**

## **1. Background**

‘Kuriti’ is the Nepali word for the term ‘Improper Culture’, that means any practice that harms, degrades, creates risk or jeopardizes an individual’s fundamental human rights such as those of equality, freedom and justice and endangers an individual’s right to a dignified life. In Nepal a number of improper practices continue to prevail in the name of culture and custom, such as the dowry system, witch-hunting, untouchability, *deuki pratha*, *chhaupadi pratha*, which seriously violate human rights. Such practices are strongly rooted in Nepali society. 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 (NWC) drafted a bill against witchcraft practices. It is unfortunate that such human rights protecting bills have not passed by the government yet.

The National Alliance to End Evil Customs Based on Violence, which is promoted by SOCH Nepal in collaborating with the NWC, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Nepal Police including the Female Cell and the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, aims to understand the gravity of the abuses and crime based on customs and practices. Furthermore, the Alliance has taken several initiatives to eradicate and abolish such practices from Nepal.

Since superstition is deeply rooted in Nepali society, it is a difficult task to change and reform such improper customs and practices. The instigation of a social movement against violence based on evil customs is the need of the time. With this in mind, the initiation of the national conference will attract the attention of the government to this issue and place pressure on the concerned authorities to address the problem.

## **2. Objective of the conference**

- To pressurize stakeholders to put an end to violence based on improper cultural practices
- To make code of conduct for the National Alliance
- To organize the Alliances at a regional level, allotting regional divisions with responsibilities within their local areas.
- To gather the victims of Kuriti from around Nepal and collect their grievances.
- To allow the opportunity for the victims of kuriti to contact concerned authorities, and gain justice appropriate for the crimes committed against them.

## **3. Conference in detail**

The National Conference was held in Kathmandu from 28-29 September 2013. The conference was organized by SOCH Nepal, a secular humanist organization based in Nepal. Representatives from all 22 districts of the Terai region of Nepal, presented the work conducted by the National Alliance since its formation in 2012. This was the main theme of the first day of the conference.

### **Day 1<sup>st</sup>**

Bimala Parajuli, National Alliance Coordinator, moderated the session. The formal session began with a deliberation from Uttam Niraula, the Executive Director of SOCH Nepal and the secretary of the 'National Alliance Against Evil Custom Based Violence'. He highlighted the objective of the conference, the definition of Kuriti, and the improper values that our society adapts, which lead to an individual's suffering. "Our culture has itself been a factor for violence. We need to separate these improper cultures from the other proper cultures. We need to identify which one of them is rational and just," said Niraula. He mentioned the ill provisions of the Civil 'Code of Nepal 1910', which is dead now. Furthermore, he explained how SOCH Nepal along with other collaborating organizations are working to bring about an 'Anti-witchcraft Act' that has now been presented to the government in the form of a bill. He added "There is an absolute responsibility of the state but as long as these various schisms providing haven to such ill values are not made aware, change is hard to happen. So, we also need to change the mentality of people". In conclusion, Mr. Niraula remarked that SOCH Nepal would work in all ways possible to bring justice to victims who have previously been deprived from this basic right.

The floor was then opened for participants to ask questions and share their hopes from the state authorities. There were 120 participants representing more than 22 districts of Nepal, the majority of which were female. Each district selected a single representative to present the status of their respective district or region regarding improper customs and practices in their locality.

### **Speakers note in the session representing from district alliance committee:**

**Meena Kharel, Chitwan**- Meena presented data that at least 70- 80% of the women in her region were subjected to violence of some kind. Unfortunately no victims of Kuriti were able to attend the conference with her. She also mentioned that previously no programs had yet been able to bring about change in her region; therefore, she remained skeptical. However, she hoped for a huge amount of success from this conference and appreciated everyone's efforts made so far.

**Sushila Darlami, Kapilvastu** - Sushila mentioned different Kuriti that prevail in her region, such as child marriage, the dowry system and witch-hunting. She explained how unequal the population in her region is. Finally she explained how violence could occur on a mental, physical, social and economic level.

**Reema B. C, Rupandehi** - Reema highlighted the meaning of violence (*himsa*). Furthermore, she explained that the act of violence on the basis of sex is an act against Human Rights not only

in Nepal, but all around the world. According to her, violence against women has tremendously increased in her district. Cases of rape, child marriage, and dowry are regular. As Rupandehi is also a transit of human trafficking, it faces many problems associated with this. In a month, at least seven rape cases are filed at the police station. She further explained that because of the influence of community-based mediation, many cases do not reach the police station; this can leave the victims helpless and in poverty. Compensations for violent crimes are also not victim centric.

**Geeta Devkota, Bara-** According to Geeta, Bara is no exception to the pain of the other districts. In her region, she told that women are killed in the name of dowry. Cases of witch-hunting are also a big issue in her region. She expressed that everybody's thoughts should be harmonized with the thoughts of organizations like SOCH Nepal and only then could a solution be reached.

**Maheswor Shrestha, Siraha-** Maheswor was downhearted mentioning Siraha as the weakest of all districts present. He stated that after the formation of a committee, they had been collecting information about violence occurring in their region and communicating it with the centre.

**Madhav Prasad Parajuli, Udayapur** – Initiatives had been taken in the region to punish those who accused someone of witchcraft.

**Kapil Gauro, Parsa** - Kapil mentioned that Parsa is highly affected by witch hunting and that victims are mainly women.

**Uma Thapa Magar, Banke-** Uma expressed her serious concern for the situation of women in her region. She said, “violence against women was at its peak and the organizations who worked for women were also few in number”. There were many cases of Kuriti; however, very few reached the court for trial.

**Khima B. K, Bardiya-** Khima thanked the media for playing a supportive role in her region. A large number of awareness programs are being organized in her region.

**Loksari Kunwar, Kailali-** In this region, all identified cases of violence and inhuman treatment are being discussed and spread by media. Therefore, the media is playing a very active role. Many programs are being organized to help receive justice for the victims.

The presentation was paused for a lunch hour.

After lunch, Pramila Shakya, a victim of witch-hunting, who was trapped in her own house by her own family after than accused her of being a witch, recounted her story to those present. As she did so her voice trembled. She was trapped in her own house for 14 years. During this time she was not allowed to see her own children. Now that her story has been revealed, she has filed a suit against the perpetrators. She was unhappy about with the unjust procedure and sanctions

provided by the laws for the crime of such nature. However, she admired society for playing a proactive role and boycotting the perpetrators from society.

**Saptari Upendra, Marik-** Saptari is a victim of untouchability. He was assaulted by a shopkeeper in a tea shop where he was asked to pay for the glass along with his tea, for being from a lower caste. He was also neglected in the police station when he went to file a complaint. Later, when he took this issue to court, Saptari received justice and the perpetrators were punished.

**Saptari Dharmendra, Marik-** Dharmendra belongs to the Dome community, a “so-called” untouchable class in society. He was asked to wash his own dishes while eating food in a shop. Later, when he took the case to the police station, the perpetrators were made to pay thousand rupees each. Dharmendra here asserted that even though the system was not against them, the result was mostly not in favor of the victims.

**Bishnu Damai, Kanchanpur** - Bishnu was prevented from using a public tap as he belonged to the untouchable class. As a results he went to the police station and the Chief District Office. However, his voice was not heard properly anywhere, as he was also unequally treated in these places. Later, on the 31 days after the incidence, he filed a lawsuit in the court of law. After one year the case was decided in his favour. The perpetrators were fined one thousand rupees each. He reacted to this event saying that the law was not victim friendly.

**Rana Bahadur Pariyar, Bardiya** - Rana belonged to a caste considered to be low and as a result was punished without any charge. He was beaten by police officers and told that he should be subject to whatever the upper caste tends for him. He was severely injured by the attack. Some organizations helped him with the medical treatment and during his recovery. He is yet to received justice.

**Devi Chaudary, Jhapa-** Devi married a man from another caste. When her husband’s family did not accept her as their daughter-in-law, her husband left her. Devi was thrown out of the house. Her marriage remains unregistered and she has a child whose birth also remains unregistered.

During the presentation of grievances of victims, there was parallel session of a press conference. Mr. Chandra Baniya, journalist of Radio Nepal, facilitated the press conference. There was participation of around 20 journalists representing various electronic and printed media houses. Mr. Uttam Niraula highlighted the importance of the movement and the need to hold a press conference. It was very delightful to see energetic participation of journalists. The journalists raised a numbers of enquiries, which were addressed Mr. Niraula. The program was about one and half hour long. The press conference was concluded with the proposition of a vote of thanks to all journalists for their attendance.

After hearing the grievances from the participants and victims, deliberation was asked from the expert on the issue. As an expert on the issue, Mr. Subarna Karmacharya, Executive Director of

National Human Rights Commission was chaired as guest. He highlighted on the issue of human rights with facts and figures and urged participants not to tolerate exploitation and injustice. On the behalf of NHRC, he committed to help victims to get justice from all possible ways. The formal session for the day ended by proposing vote of thanks by Bimal Parajuli.

## **Day 2<sup>nd</sup>**

The second day of the conference commenced with a rally from Shanti Batika, Ratna Park. All the participants and guests were called to the venue, where they gathered and a rally was organized from Shanti Batika to Trade Tower, Thapathali. The participants held cards with slogans calling for ending violence in the name of Kuriti, to stop human rights violations and enchanted slogans in unified voices. The rally ended after reaching the Trade Tower, Thapathali and the remainder of the formal program commenced there. There were more than 200 participants in the rally.

Bimala Parajuli, coordinator of 'National Alliance against violence based on evil customs, chaired the session'. The chairperson of the NWC, Mrs. Shesh Chand Tara, was chaired as chief guest of the program. Chandrika BhatTerai, chairperson of Women for Human Rights (WHR); Damodar Padasaini, Director of the Office of the Auditor General and Ramesh Paudel, former president of SOCH Nepal were chaired as guests of the ceremony. Mr. Jyoti Baniya, repoter of Radio Nepal, facilitated the program. Uttam Niraula, executive director of SOCH Nepal, introduced motive behind the program and introduced SOCH Nepal. He urged the gathering to take the activities of SOCH as a movement rather than a project. As the main objective of the program was to make interaction between victims and state authorities; the floor was opened to express the grievances of victims.

### **Victims' notes in key points:**

**Kapilbastu, Sita Devi**- Devi is a widow. She spoke of how society had viewed her of wrong intentions after her husband's demise. She has not received any property from her family and is spending her life in great misery. Her children are also suffering heavily. She is demanding that justice be provided to her children.

**Morang, Manju Pariyar**- Morang's husband had taken another wife and left her because she had not been able to give birth to any child. After her husband's second marriage, she was discriminated from the family.

**Mahottari, Usha Thapa**- Usha is a widow. She was thrown out of her home after the death of her husband; however, her late husband's family took her child away from her. Finally, with the assistance of members of the Maoist Party, her child was returned to her. Unfortunately, she is now unable to adequately educate her child. She demanded that the state needed to provide

assistance to widows and single women, such as her, for the education of their children. **Mahottari, Bimala Subedi** Mahottari is a victim of child marriage. She shared the many challenges she had faced as a child bride.

After hearing of grievances of victims, a book-launching event was held for two books published by SOCH Nepal. The first book was title 'Humanism' and the other '*Bharatiya darshan: baicharik abum samajik sangharsha*'. The chairperson of the NWC, Shesh Chand Tara, formally launched both books published by SOCH Nepal. Mr. Damodar Pudasaini, the Director of the Office of Auditor General reviewed the book; he highlighted the miserable condition of karnali and urged SOCH Nepal to work in that region too. Finally, Mr. Baal Krishna, who translated the launched books, conducted a review of book. He also threw light on the relevancy of the books in the present context. After the launching of books, it was the turn for the guest speakers to address the program. Speaking to the program, Chandrika BhatTerai, chairperson of WHR, stated that all women should be unified for the welfare of women group. She also briefly highlighted the history of WHR, single women group.

The special guest of the program Shesh Chand Tara, Chairperson of NWC, heard the grievances carefully and attempted to pacify all queries. Addressing the program, she argued that women are the main victims or sufferer of violence based on evil customs. She also mentioned the legal aid provision in Nepal where free legal service are provided to needy and poor people. She expressed her disappointment with the limitation on the jurisdiction of the Commission. She mentioned how NWC was pressurizing the government to provide more facilitation to the NWC, which is yet to happen. The chairperson of the program, Bimala Parajuli, focused on the significance of the program and urged the gathering to join hands together for the movement. The chairperson concluded the inauguration session by proposing a vote of thanks.

Loksari Kunwar, coordinator of far Western Region of the Alliance, overtook the afternoon session. The main objective of the session was to prepare a code of conduct, which is to be followed by all members of national alliance against evil customs based violence. A number of suggestions and opinions that came from participants helped in the preparation of the code of conduct. The format for filling out evil custom based violence was also distributed to each district coordinator. The program ended with commitment to end evil custom based violence throughout Nepal.

#### **4. Summary of the National Conference**

The conference entitled the "National Conference against Evil Customs Based Violence" was held from September 28- 29, 2013. The conference was born from a movement with the efforts of 'National Alliance to End Evil Custom Based Violence'; which is promoted by SOCH Nepal. SOCH Nepal has officially named the movement the "Campaign Against Inhuman, Degrading or Harsh Treatment of Nepalese Women in the Name of Culture and Tradition." In the year 2012,

the National Alliance of the Victims of Kuriti was formed to work in local communities, with the primary objective of giving a voice to the victims themselves, and empower them to make their own choices and take actions against Kuriti. At the present time, the national alliance is working in 22 different districts of the Terai region.

The Alliance representatives reported on the work being conducted in their particular region. There was an overwhelming participation of more than 150 men and women, most of them victims of Kuriti. The representatives presented papers and the grievances of the victims were heard. The Director of the 'National Human Rights Commission', the Chairperson of the 'National Women's Commission' and the Director of the 'Office of Auditor General' formed the expert panel and reflected upon their opinion on the issue, with the idea of responsibility and the failure of the state to address the issue. The first day of the conference was scheduled for the presentations from the district representatives and the pain born by the victims was heard.

The second day of the conference commenced with a rally from Shanti Batika located at Ratna Park, Kathmandu. The rally ended at the Trade Tower, Thapathali and the formal session was strated. Two books, 'Humanism-3' and '*Bharatiya darshan: baicharik abum samajik sangharsha*' were subsequently inaugurated. This session focused on hearing grievance of victims. The event was captured by state owned media. This allowed the voices of activists and victims of kuriti to reach all Nepal; thus, placing pressure on policy makers to give proper attention tp this grave violation of humoan rights.

## **5. Conclusion:**

The program was successfully conducted for two days. It worked as a common platform for exchanging the views and experience of victims, activists and journalists from different districts. The conference successfully formulated a code of conduct for the National Alliance and gathered victims of Kuriti from around Nepal and collect their grievances, and to take their voices to the concerned authorities. Furthermore, the conference, especially the rally, was fruitful in increasing attention of the media and general pubic towards the issue. The program is believed to be a good initiative step in creating a national campaign on the subject matter.



## Annexure

### Glimpses of the program



Participants of the rally



A glimpse of participants in the national conference



Mrs. Shesh Chand Tara, chairperson of NWC, launching books published by SOCH Nepal



Participants of the National Conference