

**The 12th session of UN working Group on Minorities, Geneva.
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Thank you Mr, Chairman,

I am Kasturi Shrestha from Forum for Justice, Kathmandu, Nepal and present on behalf of the indigenous /ethnic minority groups.

I would like to focus on a very sensitive issue regarding the gender mainstreaming in all sectors of development in Nepal. The ninth and tenth plan, planning commission of Nepal and Ministry of women child welfare have been allocated special budget for women and Dalit , Ethnic and Endogenous development programs based on MDG (Millennium development Goals). But still it has to give more considerations to the situation of grass- root women and marginalized communities.

Though gender egalitarianism existed in many communities, since the unification of Nepal in the late eighteenth century, the ruling elite has always been from indo-Aryan groups. This has resulted in state mechanism being controlled by their values, norms and beliefs, which are patriarchal and where the status of women has been low.

Citizenship

Since a long time women have been struggling to get Nepalese citizenship for women and children without the approval or identification of the father, husband or male guardian. We have several bitter experiences in certain minority community in the far western region of Nepal - the Badi and Madeshi community, in the plain area or border area of India.

However, recently the Nepalese government has passed a new Citizenship Act, which provides for citizenship to be granted through the name of mother. This is a positive step by the government, but the state mechanism has not yet effectively functioned in this regard. The Central District Office of Nepal has not revised its citizenship forms to reflect the change. Nepalese Citizenship is still not provided in the name of the mother. This continues to result in a lack of educational and job opportunities or options open to the children of these communities. Lack of citizenship also means that these minority communities, especially women, are denied land rights, social respect and marriage opportunities. This is a violation of article 4.1 of the UN minorities declaration and also articles 2 and 6 of CEDAW.

Participation

It is a positive step of the present government that 33% reservation for women in state mechanism was just declared. But it is wholesale figure out in national structure. It is not clear what percentage of women represent different minorities, ethnic and indigenous

groups. State mechanisms never talk about how to bring the minorities, disadvantaged and disabled women in the frontline. For example there is no representation from the Dalit community. The Government never focused to bring uplift to the minority women in national mainstreaming. Only high caste Brahmin and Chhetri women has been dominating in all state mechanism, when according to article 5 of the UNDM, there should be participation of all caste, ethnic, indigenous and racial groups.

Recommendations to the Government of Nepal:

1. Fully implement the Citizenship Act to ensure that women can register their children themselves and conduct an awareness raising campaign so that women know about this new law.
2. To educate and promote awareness of voting rights of dalit, indigenous and marginalized groups of women at grass roots level as well as national level for the forthcoming election of the constitutional Assembly. This would positively influence the participation of women in policymaking level. The Constitutional assembly is a burning issue in the changing context of Nepal as a result of the peaceful movement of people.
3. Ensure the affective participation of women, indigenous and ethnic and dalit, in all decision-making processes in the judiciary, legislative and at all administrative levels in Nepal (from village development to national level)
4. Introduce 50 percent reservation for women, in which dalit, indigenous, minorities and ethnic women representation should be included according to respective population size. Effective representatives from all groups of minority women should be involved in formulating a new independent, self-governing and qualitative National Women's Commission.

Thank you for your attention Mr, chair/ Madam Chair.

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