

Stakeholder Submission

by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/>

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Bhutan: Refugees' Right to Return and
Right to Compensation for Arbitrary Deprivation of Property

**Related to Bhutan
for the Second Cycle of the
Universal Periodic Review, 19th session, 2014**

1. Introduction

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 142 member churches in 79 representing over 70 million Christians. The LWF strives to put its faith into action within and beyond the communion. LWF acts on behalf of its member churches in areas of ecumenical and interfaith relations, theology, humanitarian assistance, human rights, communication and the various aspects of mission and development. Its secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland. The LWF has been in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1952.

In this submission, LWF will touch upon points concerning Bhutan's expulsion of one-sixth of its population and Bhutan's subsequent failure to allow Bhutanese refugees to return or to grant them compensation for the forcible deprivation of their property.

2. Bhutan's Expulsion of One-Sixth of Its Population

Between late 1990 and 1992, the government of Bhutan engaged in a program of oppression and forcible eviction that targeted the Nepali-speaking minority living in the southern part of Bhutan. (Bhutanese of Nepali origin are called Lhotsampas, or Southern Bhutanese.) As a result of this persecution, more than 90,000 people were either expelled or had to flee. They were directed by Indian authorities across the narrow belt of Indian territory that separates Bhutan from Nepal and deposited in southeastern Nepal.

The government of Nepal appealed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for assistance. The Bhutanese refugees were settled into refugee camps in southeastern Nepal. Their numbers grew to more than 100,000.

The Lutheran World Federation has been working with the Bhutanese refugees since 1991, in partnership with the UNHCR and the government of Nepal. LWF services have included camp administration and management, logistics, water and sanitation, and distribution of food and non-food items, vocational training, and income generating projects.

A program of third-country resettlement for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal began in 2007. As of September 2013, UNHCR reported that more than 100,000 refugees had registered for resettlement and that more than 81,000 persons had been able to restart their lives in eight different resettlement countries.

In the more than 20 years since the expulsion of the Bhutanese refugees, to date not a single Bhutanese refugee has been allowed to return home to Bhutan. This is despite extensive rounds of negotiations involving Bhutan, Nepal, and UNHCR, and despite the recommendations made to Bhutan in the First Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

3. Recommendations

The Lutheran World Federation respectfully suggests these recommendations for adoption by the Universal Periodic Review of Bhutan:

- a) Bhutan should begin to allow Bhutanese refugees to return to Bhutan in safety and dignity. First priority should go to the elderly (some of whom simply want to return to their homeland for their last days) and to close family members who are separated.
- b) Bhutan should provide compensation to those persons whose land and other property was seized by force or coercion in connection with the expulsion of the Southern Bhutanese in the early 1990s.