

Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group (WHR)

Kathmandu, Nepal

The ten years of armed conflict in Nepal caused significant damage in terms of loss of life and property and disappearance of many citizens. The most severely affected by conflict have been women and children. In a patriarchal society like Nepal, which tends to view women as subordinates, conflict further elevated the plight of women. During the conflict period, there were many reported and unreported cases of sexual exploitation of women (girls, widows and married women). The case studies of conflict affected women reveal the harsh fact that they were tortured, sexually assaulted, physically assaulted and in front of whom their family members were ruthlessly killed and kidnapped. In particular, the killing of people was one of the terrible consequences of the conflict and in the process many adult males were killed, leaving behind their wives who thus became widows.

In the Nepalese context, widows are marginalized under the cultural and religious contexts. Widows have been the hard hit during and after the conflict situation. They were displaced mainly to the headquarters of their districts leaving them with nothing except agony and trauma of losing their husband and going through the immense pain of surviving for themselves.

As one of the consequences of conflict, displacement had serious negative impacts on people's lives. Many civilians were caught up between Maoists and the state security forces that were forced to flee their homes for protection and security. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) were targets of killings, forced recruitment, abductions, extortions and other human rights violations.

Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR) is a non governmental organization established in 1994 that has been working for the widows' issues in Nepal. WHR works with the grassroots level single women groups and train them and capacitate them in order to have access to the local resources. WHR has till now the membership base of over 50,000 widows in 68 districts of the country out of which 3,907 widows are conflict affected. The issues that the conflict affected widows face are their inability to access the government's compensation (which is made difficult by the long process and the need to present the citizenship). Women in Nepal especially in the remote areas get married before the age of 20 years and they get married without getting enrolled or without finishing their education. This situation in their lives makes them have limited knowledge regarding the necessity of getting the citizenship.

In Kathmandu alone, there are hundreds of conflict affected displaced widows who have faced the problem of proper housing, education for their children and the job opportunities. The widows came to the WHR office for help and assistance because of which WHR established a new component to work with the conflict affected widows named 'RAAHAT' that works exclusively with the conflict affected widows.

'*RAAHAT*' has also been supporting them through various services like by providing psycho-social counseling, legal aid, scholarship, skill development training and micro credit loan for income generating activities. It has developed a legal toolkit, which contains information regarding provision for conflict affected people. Most importantly *Raahat* facilitates between concerned Ministries of Nepal Government and the single women of conflict victims on receiving compensation, pension and other relevant services. It acts as a mediator between concerned Ministries of Nepal Government and widows of conflict victim on receiving compensation. Staffs of *Raahat* visited Maoist victim camp, displaced camp and organized need identify workshop as per their need and issues.

Since advocacy is one of the major activities of WHR, during and after the conflict period in Nepal, WHR trained the widows and stakeholders on what UNSCR is and its importance for the conflict ridden countries. WHR has worked with the security personnel such as armies and police officers regarding the gender based violence and UNSCR 1325.

Recently in 2010, WHR has trained the representatives from the civil society organisations working on transitional justice with the support of UN Women. The training is given on how conflict affected can get justice and the important role that the transitional justice mechanisms play. The conflict affected women and the local organisations that are working actively for advocacy and for the conflict affected participated during the program. At present, they are working at the grassroots level advocating for the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms. In the post conflict situation, if the victims of the conflict do not get justice or if they don't see the ray of hope for their future then the situation perpetuates further conflict and engenders the culture of impunity.

WHR is also in Gender and Transitional Network led by International Centre for Transitional Justice where the organizations are collectively lobbying for the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and for the other transitional justice mechanisms at the national level. Hence, WHR has been playing an important role in highlighting the situation of conflict affected and other vulnerable women of Nepal and strongly advocacy of their right.