Joint Press Statement

Date: 24 April, 2015

Bhutan and Nepal are two Himalayan neighbors sharing common roots to ancient culture, tradition and religion. The relationships between the two countries had been good for up till 1990. After the emergence of Bhutanese refugee problem in Nepal and the issue of human rights and democracy in Bhutan, the bilateral relationship has not been as expected.

Bhutan has ushered guided multi-party democracy in 2008, and two general elections have been conducted since then. The international community led by the United States of America (US) has offered third country resettlement program since 2008 with a view to find an amicable resolution of Bhutanese refugee problem.

As of March 31, 95,902 Bhutanese refugees have left the camps in Nepal for third country resettlement. Of the total, United States of America has taken 81,192; Canada, 6271; Australia, 5357; New Zealand, 963; Denmark, 874; Norway, 561; the Netherlands, 362; and UK, 358.

At present the registered refugees in Nepal are 21,884. Of the total 17,470 are in Beldangi camps, 4380 are in Sanischare Camp, and 34 individuals are registered at Chandragadi RCU office. Timai, Goldhap and Khudunabari camps are closed.

The refugee issue in Nepal surfaced since June 1991. The UNHCR had been officially involved in the management of refugee camps since March 1992. The refugees were primarily Lhotshampa villagers from South Bhutan. The government has confiscated their properties; in many cases, already distributed to other people inside the country. After 1997, the other communities particularly Sharchop Community also became refugee due to political persecution when the eastern Bhutanese staged the demonstration demanding the establishment of democracy in Bhutan.

In this backdrop, Druk National Congress (DNC) and Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) would like to draw attention of the international community and Nepal government that there is a need to take immediate steps for:

1. Repatriation of Bhutanese refugees with honor and dignity.
2. Integration of exile political parties and human rights organization in the political process of Bhutan.
3. Granting citizenship certificate to some 28,000 Lhotshampa and 10,000 individuals from other communities, whose applications are awaiting Royal prerogatives
4. Granting of Non-Resident Bhutanese (NRB) status to the resettled Bhutanese by the Government of Bhutan.
5. Unconditional release of all political prisoners in Bhutan who have been serving prison sentence on political grounds.
We had the opportunity to demand and concerns to the leaders of different political parties in Nepal. We have met Mr. Bhim Rawal, Vice-Chairman of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) and Former Home Minister, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Senior Leader of Nepalese Congress, Former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha, senior Leader of Unified Nepal Communist Party Maoist and Former Deputy Prime Minister in-charge for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Upendra Yadav, Chairman of Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum, Nepal and Former Foreign Minister and Dr. Denish Bhattarai, Foreign Affairs Advisor to Prime Minister.

DNC and BNDP appraised the leaders about the need to find speedily resolution of the refugee problem and take forward the bilateral relationship between Bhutan and Nepal to the highest level as commensurate to the people-people relationship that has had existed since time immemorial.

DNC and BNDP also urged the political parties to urged the government of Nepal and the international community, particularly the core countries led by the US, to re-engage with Bhutan to finding an amicable solution of two and half decade old refugee problem.

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