

HALIYA FREED!!! **Bonded Labour System Abolished by Government of Nepal**

"I don't want to return home until and unless we Haliyas are freed. I have brought my family including my 2 years old son with me for this movement in Kathmandu, because there is nothing for their survival in the village. I don't want to spent my whole life ploughing the land of the landlord and I also don't want to see my children doing so to repay the loan taken by my forefathers. I am the third generation ploughing the land to repay their debt. Therefore, we are here to fight for our freedom and we are ready to die for our rights. This is a Do or Die situation for us". Raju Ram Bhul, President RHMSF, said during the release of the protest program in Kathmandu, 28 Sep. 2008

With the aim of ensuring a life with freedom and dignity for the Haliya community by freeing them from their centuries-long slavery, Rastriya Haliya Mukti Samaj Federation (RHMSF) launched Haliya movement in Kathmandu on 28 September 2008 in close coordination and collaboration with Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO) and with the assistance of LWF-Nepal and CARE Nepal. During the course of this movement, a sit-in programme was organized at Maitighar Mandala with the 11 point demands that continued for 21 days. Meanwhile, a team of Haliya submitted memorandums to the government, political parties and the stakeholders in order to draw their attention in the Haliya's demands. As a result, different political parties, leaders, national and international human rights organizations/commissions, governmental and non government agencies and organizations visited the programme and expressed their solidarity in the movement.

Ultimately, the government addressed the Haliya issue and declared the emancipation of the Haliya people as well as the cancelation of their debt on 6 Sep 2008. On behalf of the Nepal government, Cabinet Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Hon'ble Janardan Sharma said that Haliya will not be forced to work on the land which is not owned by them as this is illegal, dehumanizing and punishable. Another Cabinet Minister for Labour, Hon'ble Lekh Raj Bhatta, also expressed the commitment for the rehabilitation of Haliya. After the two days negotiation with the Haliya team the government took this decision and agreed to form Haliya Task Force comprising 9 members who developed a report and submitted to the Minister for Peace and Reconstruction on 26 September 2008. In the committee, there were 3 secretaries representing from peace and reconstruction ministry, labour ministry and Ministry of Land Reform respectively and Bhakta Bishwakarma, President of NNDSWO, Raju Ram Bhul, President of RHMSF, Chakra BK, Coordinator of RHMSF, Sita BK, Treasurer of RHMSF, Tara Shripailee, Haliya Activists and Ganesh BK, the President of RDN representing the Haliya movement.

Dreams do come true! This happened in the life of Haliya after a 21 days long protest in Mandala, Kathmandu. The exhausting and exploitative slavery system ended with the ray of hope of a new life where all Haliya people can breathe freely. However, the declaration by itself is not the whole answer that Haliyas are seeking. It needs real translation of the declaration into practice that ensures sustainable rehabilitation of Haliya families.

Haliya System and NNDSWO

Under the Haliya system the people are tilling, caring for the cattle, working on the farm and household works as per the whims of the owner from generation to generation to repay the debt taken by themselves and/or their forefathers. This is the labor abusing evil custom practiced for decades and centuries. This system is a form of slavery, that has been practiced from the ancient age and preserved by the Hindu religion. During the Rana Regime it got the chance to expand in Nepal.

Moneylenders, charging usurious loan rates forced poor villagers to borrow money from them and in return made them plough their land. In order to live the farmers gave in to loan rates much higher

than they could afford to repay. This debt is passed from father to son. The farmers have to give the landowners all their productions and in return they are paid only low wages, not even enough to feed their families. Hence, the poor laborers get trapped in the vicious cycle of debt bondage, exploitation and discrimination which pass on to their children and their children's children.

According to Haliya survey 2000, NNDSWO Kailali, the total population of Haliya is about 150,000. The literacy rate is very low. The male literacy rate is 24 % and female is less than 19%. Almost all haliyas are landless and those who own land are about 10% only. All haliyas are in debt i.e. average loan per household is Rs 8, 545. They are far behind from the basic services provided by the states i.e. only 7% use toilet or latrines and for drinking water 83% use public tap and 17% draws water from wells.

Haliya are fighting for the freedom with suffering from Hunger, poverty and illiteracy besides, they are facing, Socio-cultural oppression, economic denials, Caste discrimination, Lack of education, High interest rate, No land ownership, Lack of access on the decision making level, Lack of opportunity for the employment, Displace from traditional skill, Highly labour exploitation, High population growth rate, lack of self confidence, Unaware of state law and policies, and lack of knowledge on Human Right which can be the major constraints on the rehabilitation process.

NNDSWO and Partners' efforts,

In the support of LWF-Nepal, NNDSWO has been advocating for the Rights and Emancipation of Haliya since 2000. The organization has made lot of effort to make aware and empower the Haliya community as well as to bring their unheard voices on the policy making level and sensitize the stakeholder on issues of Haliyas. At present NNDSWO conducting several activities regarding Sustainable rehabilitation of Haliya and playing the leading role on negotiation with government.

Some Major activities done by NNDSWO till now in favour of Haliyas Kailali, NNDSWO district chapter conducted various awareness raising activities in 2002, empowerment and capacity building, community organization formation at district and regional level from 2001-2007. NNDSWO took initiation by filing the cases in Supreme Court. Besides these NNDSWO has done research regarding the Haliyas on far western development region and published voices of Haliya magazines. In order to create awareness among the general public, NNDSWO broadcasted TV clips was done through Nepal television, organized workshops, conferences, street dramas.

Above events and achievements are the sample efforts and achievements up to this moment but now this is time for the sustainable rehabilitation of Haliya community through the Scio-economic as well as agricultural transformation.

The abolition of the Haliyas system is significant only when there is holistic approach to eradicating also the exploitative modes of production and providing opportunities for alternative means of livelihood so that Haliyas can lead an independent and dignified life. Otherwise, full emancipation will never be realized and Haliyas will be left with no choice but to relapse or undergo other forms of exploitation.

Demand of Haliya,

- Nationwide, Formal declaration of Haliya Emancipation should be announced dismissing the debt of Haliya who have lived under slavery for decades.
- The land and house occupied by Haliya should be registered in their own name or necessary material to construct the house should be provided. Each Haliya family should be given 10 Kattha

on the Tarai and 10 Ropanis in the hilly Region until the Revolutionary land Reform is implemented.

- The Higher Level Haliya Emancipation and Rehabilitation commission should be established.
- The Act to out law Haliya labour system must be enacted
- Compensation of One Lakh should be provided for each freed haliya family.
- A survey should be conducted with the active involvement of organizations working on Haliya issues to develop data on Haliya. A report should be made public and the data should be used to provide each Haliya with the facilities and services available on the basis of Identity Card.
- Alternative means of employment should be guaranteed on the basis of ONE EMPLOYMENT PER ONE HOUSEHOLD through private and public enterprises, company and foreign employment.
- Insecurity during rehabilitation because of caste discrimination must be prevented.
- Haliya should be proportionally represented in every sector of the state.
- This agreement should be implemented on all upcoming program and policy of the Nepal Government.
- Health and Education should be provided to and domestic violence, exploitation and physical/mental torture eradicated against Haliya women and all the demand should be carried out on the package.