



Nepal: Ensure safety of returning migrant workers

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 12 June 2020) – Inadequate quarantine facilities and mismanagement of Nepal’s migrant workers returning from India could lead to a human rights crisis, rights groups said.

In a joint statement, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and seven of its member organisations urge the Government of Nepal to ensure safe border-crossing and adequate quarantine facilities to protect its returning migrant workers.

‘Driven by poverty, environmental degradation or social instability, a large proportion of Nepali migrants are from the most vulnerable communities and worked as daily wagers. Without sufficient social protection, they are prone to shock and adverse impact. Being exposed to a pandemic would only exacerbate their pre-existing vulnerabilities and poor human rights condition,’ the rights groups said.

India has been one of the most popular destinations for Nepali migrants due to its proximity and the 1,870 km-long open border. An estimated 37.5 per cent of the two million absent population of Nepal are in India.¹

Since the onset of the pandemic, both the Nepal and India governments were not able to manage the cross-border movement in a coordinated manner. Since late March, thousands of migrant workers from both sides of the border have been left stranded due to lockdown measures imposed by both countries.

In Nepal, the heavy congestion and lack of basic facilities in quarantine centres have spurred panic about spread of the virus. More than 500 migrant workers have escaped out of fear.² Due to the influx of returnees in a short period of time, the authorities have struggled to provide basic needs such as foods and accommodation for the returning migrants.³

FORUM-ASIA and its member organisations acknowledge that the sudden increase of returnees could cause major challenges to the Nepali government given limited resources, but the rights and safety of migrant workers should not be compromised especially during a public health crisis.

FORUM-ASIA and its member organisations call on the Government of Nepal to:

1. Coordinate with the Indian government to facilitate the safe return of both Nepali and Indian migrants from both sides of the border;

¹ <https://nepal.iom.int/sites/default/files/publication/Migration%20in%20Nepal%20-%20a%20Country%20Profile%202019.pdf>

² <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/health/covid-19-more-than-500-migrant-workers-in-nepal-escape-quarantine-70111>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/ticking-time-bomb-nepal-returning-migrant-workers-200608132836376.html>

2. Ensure the meaningful participation of migrant workers in the decision-making process of their concern and provide adequate social safety net;
3. Allocate sufficient budget and establish a strong monitoring mechanism to ensure the full implementation of policies and measures responding to the pandemic; and
4. To ensure equal access to safe shelter, suitable sanctuary, food, water, healthcare services, and care-giving support during periods of obligatory quarantine.

The joint statement is endorsed by:

1. Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC)
2. Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC)
3. Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYCN)
4. Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC), Nepal
5. National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice (Human Rights Alliance)
6. Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
7. Youth Action Nepal (YOAC)

About FORUM-ASIA

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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