Bhutan: Land of happiness for the selected

This inaugural edition of NRC Reports is the first in a series with which the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) aims to highlight neglected conflicts. As an acclaimed expert on international work with forced displacement, the Norwegian Refugee Council has a particular responsibility in bringing long-running, neglected conflicts onto the humanitarian and political agendas. Humanitarian efforts and advocacy should not be determined by political agendas that favour high-profile crises over the suffering that takes place far from the attention of media and politicians.

Bhutan, a tiny isolated kingdom sandwiched between the giant states of China and India, has a troubled recent history. Despite the extensive abuse of its own population, the country has – to a large extent – managed to avoid criticism in the international media. On the contrary, the media has often helped perpetuate the myth of an exotic land – and economic and military power, values and identity of the most vulnerable groups. However, the situation in the country is more or less deteriorated in the 1980s

Since 1993, the fate of the refugees has been the object of bilateral negotiations between the Bhutanese government and the government of Nepal. There have been no concrete results: not even a single refugee has been allowed to return home. Moreover, according to many observers, the Government of Bhutan has been deliberately employing delaying tactics to drag out these negotiations. The frustration amongst the refugees is mounting, and donors are becoming increasingly passive. The proposal of voluntary resettlement for the refugees in a third-country is positive – especially for the most vulnerable groups. However, the Norwegian Refugee Council believes that the international community must also defend the refugees’ right to return, in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and should push for their citizenship to be restored. Furthermore, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should gain access to monitor the human rights situation in the country in order to prevent new violations. As Bhutan’s closest ally – and economic and military maintainer – India bears a significant responsibility for finding a solution for the Bhutanese refugees in accordance with international standards. But the greatest responsibility lies with Bhutan itself. The refugees must have a voice in the country’s first real parliamentary elections to be held in the spring of 2008. Exclusion of an ethnic group before an election cannot be considered real democratization. It is, rather, an inclusive policy that will best serve the long-term interests of Bhutan. There can be no Shangri-la without human rights.

The most influential group is the Ngalong to which the King belongs. A people of Nepalese origin, known as the Lhotshampas, constitute a large minority concentrated in the south of the country. They were taught Nepali in schools in the southern districts and had the possibility of a government career. Indeed, many became Bhutanese citizens under the 1938 Nationality Law.

Every sixth citizen is a refugee

Situated in the Himalayas between Tibet and India, Bhutan used to be a multi-cultural and relatively harmonious society – a meeting point of Hindus and Buddhists and peoples of different languages and cultures. However, in the 1980s the picture of a harmonious Shangri-la began to fall apart.

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Wary of the possibility of their increased influence and power, the Ngalong elite started to view the Lhotshampa minority as a threat. A series of measures was initiated that in many ways resemble a process of ethnic cleansing.

The Citizenship Act of 1977 introduced more restrictive criteria that had to be met to obtain nationality. In particular, the requirement to read and write Dzongkha, the national language, was a challenge for many Lhotshampas who could not read and write at all – Dzongkha being, moreover, a completely foreign language to them. However, the 1985 Citizenship Act went even further in its demands. Documentary evidence was required to prove that one had paid land tax, and been registered in 1958, the year of the first Nationality Act. In addition, one must
Bhutan—Background

not have spoken or acted against the King, the country and the people. In order to implement the law, the Bhutanese government organised a census in 1988. It was clearly aimed at identifying non-Bhutanese citizens, rather than at producing statistical data about the population, the survey only being carried out in the southern districts, where most Lhotshampas lived. When it became clear how stringent and unreasonable the requirements were with regard to documentation, people grew worried. Providing thirty-nine-year-old agricultural tax receipts would be difficult enough in the West, and was even more challenging in the largely paperless and illiterate society of Bhutan. Based on the documents each person could present, the Lhotshampas were divided into the following seven categories:

1. Genuine Bhutanese citizens
2. Returned migrants, i.e. people who left Bhutan and then returned
3. People who were not around at the time of the census
4. Non-national men married to Bhutanese women, and their children
5. Non-national women married to Bhutanese men, and their children
6. People who were not around at the time of the census
7. Legally adopted children
8. Non-nationals

According to the authorities, the 1988 census revealed large numbers of illegal immigrants. Only those who could provide a tax receipt dated 1958 were classified as F1, genuine Bhutanese citizens. Many of the so-called illegal Nepalese could prove that they had lived in Bhutan for more than 20 years. Some could even prove that they lived in Bhutan in 1957 and 1959, but this was no use if they did not have a tax receipt from 1958. The 1958 Nationality Law stated that a Bhutanese citizen who abandons his agricultural land to live outside the country loses his citizenship, and this was never changed in the subsequent Citizenship Acts. Thus the Lhotshampas who could prove residence in 1957 and 1959 but not in 1958 were defined as returned migrants (F2). Citizenship cards that had been issued before 1988 were no longer valid and were, in a number of cases, confiscated by the census officials. In general there was much confusion as to the interpretation of the Citizenship Act, because everything ultimately depended on the census officials. As a result, similar cases were classified differently, in different districts.

"One Nation, One People" The nationality legislation was not the only measure from the Bhutanese authorities which directly discriminated against the Lhotshampas. In 1987 the fifth Five Year Plan was introduced. One of the main aims of the plan was the preservation and promotion of the national identity. It stated that maintaining and strengthening a distinct national identity was a vital factor for Bhutan’s well-being and security, and was later epitomised in the slogan “One Nation, One People”. As a part of this policy, in 1989 the King issued a royal decree to promote so-called Bhutanese etiquette, the national costume and the Dzongkha language. (We return to these elements in the chapter "The ethnic dimension"). These laws and changes came about in an absolute monarchy where few democratic channels to speak out existed. They had one purpose: to consolidate what the government perceived the national identity to be, but what was in practice the identity of northern Bhutan. Understandably, there was mounting frustration among the minorities who saw the laws being continuously changed while they themselves were without any real democratic influence.

The royal decree on national identity was allegedly implemented after the population had been consulted by the King. What exactly this consultation constituted is a different matter: Bhutan was and still is a very hierarchical society. People are extremely reluctant to criticise superiors openly, and it would have been unthinkable for anybody to oppose the King directly.

Resistance grows in the south However, the mounting pressure on the populace suggested that reactions would follow, and indeed the policies were met with resistance, especially in the south. The combination of the census and citizenship acts, the “One Nation, One People” policy, and the vilification of the ethnic Nepali community, led to the Lhotshampas feeling culturally marginalised, harassed and directly discriminated against. Eventually they raised their concerns with a Lhotshampa member of the Royal Advisory Council, a body tasked with advising the King and supervising policy implementation. As a result, however, the bureaucrat was jailed for sedition, though he was later granted amnesty by the King, and for Nepal where he became a prominent leader of the exile movement.

Indeed, by 1990 the political opposition movement had grown both inside and outside Bhutan. Thousands participated in demonstrations organised in southern Bhutan. These demonstrations were largely peaceful, but a significant number of Lhotshampas were arrested and imprisoned for several months without trial. Many were tortured and released only after signing papers stating that they would leave the country upon their release.

After the crackdown on the demonstrations, the authorities introduced even more oppressive measures. Central to this was that all inhabitants had to obtain a police clearance called a No-Objection Certificate (NOC), without which people could not send their children to school, get medical assistance, obtain travel documents, get a scholarship or a government job, or get paid for selling farm products. It was impossible to get an NOC for those who had participated in the demonstrations, and no one was permitted to get one for relatives of those who had been involved or had left the country. As a result, all relatives of political protesters or refugees were denied basic services and rights, thus making it increasingly difficult for Lhotshampas to continue living in Bhutan.

Refugee flow Consequently, large numbers of Lhotshampas started fleeing Bhutan. Many were forced to sign documents stating that they were leaving voluntarily. Photographs in which they were forced to smile were intended to support this claim. Upon arrival in India, Indian security forces made sure the refugees moved on to Nepal. Several hundred refugees arrived in Nepal each month, and in September 1991 they numbered 5000. At that time, the Nepalese government requested help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and who assumed responsibility for the refugee camps in south-east Nepal. In the following years, the number of refugees grew to 108 000. The Nepalese Red Cross Society believes that an additional 15 000 to 30 000 living in India. Meanwhile, the Lhotshampas who remained in Bhutan are still facing continuing discrimination. The Bhutanese authorities have made their lives so hard that they too may eventually have no other option but to join the other refugees in exile.
A multiethnic society

With three large ethnic groups and 24 languages Bhutan is truly a multiethnic society. According to the authorities this diversity is a threat to harmony and national security.

The 2005 census results put the population of Bhutan at 635,000 – considerably lower than the one million figure used previously, but which was not based on a census. The country’s inhabitants can be divided into three major ethnic groups speaking 24 different languages: the Ngang, to which the King and between 15 to 20 percent of the population belong, are Buddhists who came originally from Tibet and primarily settled in the mountainous western region. Around 1850 a group of people consisting mainly of Hindu foresters migrated from Nepal, and began settling in the lowland regions of southern Bhutan. They cleared large tracts of forest for agriculture, and, over time, some could afford to purchase the land themselves.

From 1961 onwards, Bhutan also recruited Indian and Nepalese workers to help implement the first Five Year Plan. Historical data shows that by the end of the 1980s, Bhutan could count about 200,000 people of Nepalese origin. In Bhutan they are referred to as Lhotsampas, literally people from the southern border.

Diversity being limited: The Bhutanese king and government hold that, while positive in a large country, cultural diversity is a threat to the harmony and national security of a small country like Bhutan. In Bhutan today people often speak of only two groups: The Drukpa, the Buddhists in the north, and the Lhotsampas in the south. This distinction is used even though Drukpa literally means ‘people from Bhutan’. One obvious reason for dividing the population into only two groups is the difference in religion; another is that the authorities like to present the population of northern Bhutan as belonging to one ethnicity, denying the differences between the groups inhabiting the north.

While the introduction of the aforementioned “One Nation, One People” policy aims at enhancing the national identity, it is clear that the promotion of the Driglam namsha code of etiquette (see box), the traditional costume, and Dzongkha, at the same time reduces cultural diversity.

The dress code has been most strictly enforced in the south, leaving the Lhotsampas with the impression that the rule targets them, since they were the only major ethnic group not wearing northern Bhutanese dress. Since 1989 it has been compulsory to not only wear the costume in and around government offices, schools and monasteries, but also in public during working hours.

To a large extent Nepal previously served as the lingua franca in Bhutan. Sharchop, the large Buddhist minority in the east, often used Nepali in communication with Ngangos. This is because Sharchopkha (or Tsangka) and Dzongkha are not mutually intelligible. However, as a consequence of the promotion of Dzongkha, since 1990 Nepali is no longer taught at schools in southern Bhutan, as it has become compulsory to speak Dzongkha for official purposes.

Drukpa Kagyu, the Buddhist sect of the Ngang, is the religious establishment in the country and is represented in state institutions. According to the Sharchops who follow the Nyingma sect of Buddhism, the national identity policy also extends to religious matters: Nyingma institutions in eastern Bhutan have been converted into the Kagyu sect by replacing the leaders, and those who opposed, have either been imprisoned or fled the country.

To sum up, the “One Nation, One People” policy affects almost all aspects of life. When taken together with the citizenship legislation, the forced assimilation and the discrimination, these measures bear a certain resemblance to ethnic cleansing.

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BEHAVIOUR AND ETIQUETTE, BHUTANESE STYLE

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As early as around 1850, Nepali-speaking Hindus from Nepal started migrating to southern Bhutan.
Bhutan is a small buffer state between China and India, and has watched with apprehension how Tibet’s cultural heritage has been destroyed by the Chinese, whilst the semi-autonomous Sikkim became an Indian state in 1975. The latter happened in a referendum, in which the Nepali-dominated immigrant population decided the fate of the kingdom. Bhutan became anxious that this could also happen in their country, in spite of the fact that India was instrumental in helping Bhutan acquire UN membership in 1971 – a political acknowledgement of India’s recognition of Bhutan as a sovereign state.

CLOSE TO INDIA Bhutan has always had a special relationship with India. This is evident in the Indo-Bhutanese treaty of 1949, which included a clause that India would steer Bhutan’s foreign policy. This relationship grew stronger after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, and India playing an active role by financing Bhutan because of Indian insurgents, (in particular the United Liberation Front of Assam and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland), who use the southern Bhutanese jungle as shelter.

PROTEST MARCHES HALTED In practice however, India has not been the neutral neighbour it claims to be. When the Lhotshampas first fled to India, security forces shuttled them to the Nepalese border, refusing them permission to stay in India. On two later occasions, when a group of Lhotshampas organised a march from the refugee camps to Bhutan, they were stopped by Indian security forces when crossing the Nepalese border. In 2007 they were even fired at. However, one month after this incident, India for the first time defined the refugee issue as an international instead of a bilateral problem, and India’s Minister of Foreign Affairs has stated that the Indian government will work towards a solution. He still showed some reservation though, by adding that repatriation of 100.000 refugees to a country of little over 600,000 inhabitants would create a demographic imbalance. “As such, India remains the most important guarantor for Bhutan and its current regime.”

Nepalese and Bhutanese NGOs in exile do not believe the problem can be solved bilaterally. They have been advocating for international pressure on the Nepalese government and for donor countries to withdraw their support from Bhutan if no solution is found.

SEEKING REFUGE Hari was met by Indian security forces when he reached the border, and put on a bus to Nepal. At the time he arrived in Nepal, no refugee camps had yet been built. They lived in the jungle, where they improvised the first refugee camp, which would later become known as Timai. They tried to organise their lives as best as they could but their living conditions were extremely poor. New refugees kept coming every day and there was hardly any food, water or sanitation facilities; many people became sick and died. The situation was desperate. When UNHCR took over the responsibility for the refugees, Timai was improved and six other camps were built. They all exist on long lines of bamboo huts, but they vary in size. The smallest camp houses about 9,000 refugees, while Beldangi II is home to 22,000 people. Many of the refugees have been in the camps for more than 15 years now, and about 40,000 children have never experienced anything but life in a refugee camp. The Nepalese
Daily chores in Timai refugee camp, Nepal.
Both UN and a small group of countries, which includes Norway, have been committed to solving the Bhutanese refugee crises. But international appeals and suggestions for solutions have not been well-received by the Bhutanese authorities.

One of UNHCR’s main aims is to seek durable solutions, but the organisation, together with other international actors, has been completely sidelined in the bilateral discussions of the Bhutanese and Nepalese governments. In an attempt to solve the refugee crisis, Nepal has several times requested the inclusion of a third party, which Bhutan has rejected, leaving UNHCR confined to a strictly humanitarian role.

**CORE GROUP**

In November 2005, Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States organised themselves into the Core Working Group on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal, in which the European Commission participates as an observer. The Core Group aims to find durable solutions to the Bhutanese refugee problem, and encourages the governments of Bhutan and Nepal to cooperate with UNHCR. The Bhutanese government has been called upon to provide written terms and conditions of return in order to implement the commitments to repatriation made in 2003, and to ensure that conditions in the country will not cause further forced displacement. The members of the Core Group are willing to provide assistance with repatriation efforts and a number of particularly vulnerable refugees have been accepted for third country resettlement.

**NORWAY’S POSITION**

As a member of the Core Group, Norway aims to break the stalemate and address both the humanitarian and the political side of the Bhutanese refugee crisis. The country has accepted a small group of refugees for resettlement, and in 1996 Bhutan was designated as a partner country for development aid. Bhutan lost this status in 2001, when Norway cut down the number of partner countries, but between 2001 and 2004 other agreements were signed between the two countries. As such, the Bhutanese energy sector and the management and planning of water resources will be supported through cooperation between the Bhutanese Department of Energy and the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate. In 2006 the total financial support from Norway to Bhutan amounted to 8.5 million kroner (about 1.54m US dollars). The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has discussed the Bhutanese refugee crisis with both the Bhutanese and the Nepalese governments. However, a solution to this problem has never been demanded as a prerequisite for the above economic agreements. Despite providing substantial bilateral development aid, few donor states have been willing to use that leverage to pressurise Bhutan over the refugee issue. Appeals for greater flexibility have been made to the Bhutanese authorities at Core Group donor meetings, but no steps have been taken to link development aid with solving the refugee problem.

**RESSETLEMENT**

At the end of 2006, the offer from the United States of America and several other countries to accept at least 85,000 refugees sparked both hope and tension in the refugee camps. Many are happy finally to be able to leave the camps, and naturally, many parents are anxious to give their children a better future. Some of the refugee leaders, however, criticise the fact that this solution only addresses the humanitarian needs of the refugees, while the original reasons for the Bhutanese refugee crisis are political. They argue that resettlement in third countries allows Bhutan to get away with the ethnic cleansing of about one sixth of its population. The international community depended upon consent from the Nepalese government, and once the green light came in November 2007, UNHCR and some of the resettlement countries’ governments initiated a massive information campaign among the refugees. Actual resettlement was expected to start in early 2008, while voluntary repatriation is still not an option for the Bhutanese refugees.
Democratization, but not for the refugees

The Bhutanese King has initiated a process of democratization, but large groups of people are excluded.

The previously isolated and autocratic Bhutanese monarchy is currently changing its attitude to democracy and human rights. Most importantly, in 2008, the country’s first ever constitution will be inaugurated. Partly due to the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which states that development must be much more than only economic growth, change has come about gradually in Bhutan. Looking at the country’s recent history, however, some major economic, political and infrastructural changes have occurred. Serfdom has been abolished in the previously feudal society and an educational system has been developed.

Constitution and elections

In recent years the King has started a process of democratization. In 1998 he granted the National Assembly the power to remove him by a two-thirds vote of no-confidence, he moved executive powers from the Throne to the Cabinet of Ministers, and in 2001 he ordered the drafting of the first Bhutanese constitution. This constitution will pave the way for the first democratic parliamentary elections to be held in 2008. The population today elects only one third of the National Assembly; the other members are monks and people chosen by the King. The draft constitution, which was first published in March 2005, introduces political parties, which were not allowed before, and acknowledges freedom of the press and the right to freedom of religion as fundamental rights. Even though these articles are clear steps in the direction of democratization, other hot topics have not been dealt with. In line with the “One Nation, One People” policy, the constitution is silent with regard to the cultural diversity of the country. The constitution only mentions the national language Dzongkha, completely ignoring the other 23 languages spoken in Bhutan10. The fact that only those with a formal university degree are allowed to stand in national elections, also excludes many from participating.

Political parties

Diversity in the political party system will also be limited, as the majority party will form the government, and the second largest party the opposition. It now looks like only two political parties will contest the 2008 elections. At the end of November 2007, based on rather vague reasons, the Election Commission rejected the application of a third party. Both registered parties have close links to the royal family, of which the Bhutanese refugees have been particularly critical.

Importantly, none of the existing political parties in exile are registered for the elections, and refugee-related issues remain unresolved. The last census, carried out in 2005, does not include the names of the refugees – since they had already fled Bhutan – and they will therefore not be registered to vote in the 2008 elections.

Citizenship cards denied

The National Front for Democracy Bhutan, a coalition of Bhutanese political parties in exile, has submitted an alternative draft constitution to the King. Stressing their constructive attitude towards democratization in Bhutan, the organisation formed its own drafting committee and organised a wide range of discussions and consultations. The resulting alternative draft constitution is very similar to the official version but differs in some crucial areas, notably in article six, which deals with citizenship. It is, however, unlikely that article 6 – which repeats the requirements of the 1985 Citizenship Act – will be changed.

Citizenship cards and, consequently, not be allowed to vote. No exact figures are available but it is widely believed that many of them are Lhotshampas. From southern Bhutan Lhotshampas report that only people classified as F1 (Genuine Bhutanese citizens) or F4 (Non-national women married to Bhutanese men, and their children) receive a citizenship card. Moreover, those classified in the other categories usually do not have a No Objection Certificate. According to many Bhutan researchers, the constitution could create a snowball effect with regard to democratization. Through the establishment of political parties, many more citizens will have the opportunity to participate in Bhutanese politics. In addition, through competition between different parties, people may gradually become more aware of their rights and how they are enshrined in the constitution. It remains unclear, however, how this will affect the Lhotshampas still living in Bhutan, or indeed those who have been forced to live in exile for the past 15 years. Many Lhotshampas actually fear it will become increasingly difficult to continue living in Bhutan.
Bhutanese policies create stateless refugees

The “One Nation, One People”-policy makes the Bhutanese refugees stateless. The authorities violate fundamental human rights and international conventions.

A stateless person is someone who is not considered a national according to the domestic law of any state. In many ways the person does not exist legally, because nationality or citizenship is the legal bond between the state and the individual that ensures rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, some people may be de facto stateless because they are unable to prove their nationality and therefore do not enjoy the same rights as others, such as having a passport or the right to return. Normally citizenship is granted through recorded birth on the territory, descent from another citizen, or naturalization by marriage or long term residence, but there are variations between domestic laws (which in itself may cause statelessness). According to UNHCR’s “Refugees” magazine from 2007 with a special report on the stateless, the official figure of stateless persons in the world is 5.8 million, while the agency estimates that the true total is probably closer to 15 million.

A refugee is not necessarily stateless and a stateless person is not necessarily a refugee, but sometimes the related issues and problems overlap. Some refugees are stripped of citizenship as punishment for fleeing or as part of persecution – as we see in the Bhutanese case. All the Lhotshampa refugees not defined as genuine Bhutanese citizens are stateless. Considering the aforementioned verification exercise that was carried out in one of the refugee camps, we are potentially talking about 97.6 % of the camp population. Furthermore, many Lhotshampas still living in Bhutan did not receive a citizenship card after the 2005 census.

The Right to Citizenship

There are several legal treaties and declarations relevant to the situation of the stateless. We find a right to nationality already in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) article 15, but the questions of which state should grant nationality, and under what circumstances, remained unsolved. More legally binding and specific treaties were developed later such as the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A problem with these two conventions, however, is the low rate of ratification; Bhutan, for example, is party to neither.

There are, however, more widely ratified conventions relevant to statelessness. Bhutan has only ratified two conventions. One is the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which contains obligations that prevent statelessness. According to article 7, states should systematically register children at birth and provide nationality, something Bhutan has failed to do. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which prohibits discrimination of women when it comes to passing on nationality, is the other convention that the country has ratified. The Bhutanese distinction between F4, (Non-national women married to Bhutanese men, and their children), and F5, (Non-national men married to Bhutanese women, and their children), clearly breaks this convention. Several other treaties such as the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), also contain provisions that should prevent arbitrary deprivation or denial of nationality. It is especially important to remember when it comes to countries that have ratified few conventions, that rights considered customary law and the general principles of law apply to all countries regardless of whether they have signed or ratified treaties or not.

Discriminatory Measures

The “One Nation, One People” policies, the forced assimilation and other discriminatory measures are in breach of the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which Bhutan is a signatory (but the con-
For refugees, there is an international consensus that voluntary repatriation is the preferred option. Bhutan, however, denies refugees the right to return – even the refugees who have been classified as genuine Bhutanese citizens by the verification team in 2003, have not been allowed to move back to Bhutan. It is only considered safe for refugees to return if the country of origin can guarantee physical, legal and material safety, so that international protection is no longer necessary. Considering the conditions of the Lhottshampas still living in Bhutan, this cannot be said to be the case. Refugees should furthermore be allowed to return to their own property, and be compensated for what they have lost. This right remains even if they have been forced to sign a form saying that they have received compensation when they fled the country.

Local Integration
A second durable solution is local integration. This entails extending the rights generally enjoyed by others in society to the refugees, and as far as possible facilitating their naturalisation. Since, according to the Nepalese government, the responsibility for solving the refugee crisis lies with the Bhutanese government, Nepal has not taken any steps in the direction of local integration yet. Many refugee children are born in Nepal, and there have been a substantial number of marriages between refugees and Nepalese nationals. They have, however, been unable to acquire Nepalese citizenship despite the provisions of the CRC and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Resettlement
The third durable solution is third country resettlement. With the offer from a group of Western countries, this has become an option for the Bhutanese refugees, but has also caused tension in the camps. It is crucial that resettlement be entirely voluntary, and it is important to stress that third country resettlement leaves the right to return completely open.

To the government of Bhutan:
- Eliminate all discrimination against ethnic Nepalis and take steps to ensure that no new displacement takes place inside Bhutan.
- Abolish the system of No Objection Certificates (NOC) that allows all Bhutanese citizens to register as voters for the 2008 elections.
- Respect the right of return for all Bhutanese refugees, respect their right to housing, land and property restitution and invite the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish a presence in Bhutan in order to facilitate the return and reintegration of returnees.
- Invite the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to establish a presence in Bhutan in order to monitor and protect the Human Rights of all refugees.

To the government of Nepal:
- Improve physical security in the refugee camps in order to protect the refugees’ freedom of expression and freedom to choose without pressure or harassment.
- Guarantee respect for the right to freedom of movement for refugees, and authorize them to seek employment in Nepal.
- Show greater flexibility in allowing resettlement for those deemed eligible by third countries.
- Contribute to durable solutions, including by allowing Bhutanese refugees to integrate in Nepal.

To UNHCR, Core Group countries, The Friends of Bhutan and the international community:
- Continue to provide sufficient and sustained humanitarian aid for the Bhutanese refugees for as long as they remain in the camps in Nepal.
- Provide clear, impartial, detailed and up-to-date information about all durable solutions to the refugees.
- Work with the government of Nepal to provide physical security in the refugee camps in order to protect the refugees’ freedom of expression and freedom to choose without pressure or harassment.
- Urge Bhutan to accept the return of Bhutanese refugees under proper international monitoring and respect their right to housing, land and property restitution.
- Make clear to the Bhutanese authorities that further expulsions of ethnic Nepalis is unacceptable.
- Urge Bhutan to immediately stop its policy of discrimination against its ethnic Nepali citizens and take steps to ensure that no new displacement takes place inside Bhutan.
- Emphasise to Bhutan and all parties that the choice of resettlement is voluntary and does not in any way negate the right to return.