

**Resolution on the plight of Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan**

The European Parliament,

- A. deeply concerned at the plight of some 86 000 mostly Nepali-speaking refugees from Bhutan who are currently in refugee camps in eastern Nepal and of 15 000 others dispersed in neighbouring areas of Nepal and India,
- B. aware that Bhutan's policy of 'national integration', on the basis of western Bhutanese (Drukpa) traditions and culture, led to a campaign, begun in 1990, of suppression of Nepali cultural expression in Bhutan, revocation of citizenship and intimidation, arrests and sometimes torture of ethnic Nepalese, resulting in a large-scale exodus to Nepal of these people,
- C. disturbed that, according to a recent report of the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, the conditions in the refugee camps have deteriorated, especially with regard to medical care and education, and that certain of the aid agencies, including the UNHCR, are now scaling down or withdrawing their assistance to these camps,
- D. whereas several Bhutanese refugee groups organized peaceful demonstrations to protest against this unacceptable situation and undertook a march from Nepal to Bhutan across Indian territory,
- E. whereas, according to a report by Amnesty International, several demonstrators were arrested by the Indian authorities in mid-January 1996 and released after judicial verifications, but whereas several of them are soon to be brought before the Silguri court,
- F. noting that the movement to bring about democratic reform in Bhutan has been largely based in southern Bhutan,
  - 1. Calls on the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal, in cooperation with all other parties involved, to reach an agreement which will allow the early, voluntary repatriation of these Bhutanese refugees to their country of origin;
  - 2. Considers that the Indian authorities must take full account of the humanitarian situation of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and acquit all persons arrested during the peaceful protest demonstrations;
  - 3. Calls on the Government of Bhutan to make practical preparations for the UNHCR-supervised return of these refugees, and to safeguard the rights of minorities on its territory;
  - 4. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Governments of the Member States to provide assistance to the refugees in eastern Nepal (some of whom have been denied official refugee status), both via the Government of Nepal and via the aid agencies operating in the field;
  - 5. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Governments of the Member States, in liaison with the UNHCR, to discuss with the Government of Bhutan proposals for the provision of assistance for the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of these refugees in their former homes in Bhutan;

6. Notes that, in this connection, most of these refugees would appear to qualify under international law as being genuine citizens of Bhutan and considers that Bhutan's Citizenship Act of 1985 may need to be modified as a result;
  
7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments of the Member States, the Governments of Bhutan, Nepal and India and the Secretariat of SAARC.