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ARTICLE 19

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Nepal: Protesting Tibetan Refugees Threatened with Expulsion

The new government in Kathmandu is implementing a new strategy for dealing with Tibetan protesters: threat of expulsion from Nepal.

In the run up to the Olympic Games in Beijing more than 8,000 ethnic-Tibetans were detained in Kathmandu for exercising their rights to freedom of speech and assembly in daily non-violent protests outside both the UN offices and the Chinese Consulate.

With the Paralympic Games officially ending and the global media spotlight moving away from China, the protesters have become more vulnerable to official complaints voiced by the Chinese Ambassador.

The newly formed Nepalese government has reacted to such complaints, and decreasing interest from the international media, by intensifying state harassment of protesters. The most recent detention of 137 protesters was followed by an announcement by a government spokesman that any Tibetan refugee caught protesting who lacks the correct Refugee Certificate will face expulsion, most probably to India.

This is clearly a politically motivated method of suppressing a minority group's freedom of speech and assembly – the documentation demanded has rarely been granted since 1989, despite promises made to the United States government and the UNHCR.

“We call on the new government of Nepal to recognise that according to Article 19 and Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), everyone, including refugees, has the right to freedom of expression and the right of peaceful assembly” said Dr Agnes Callamard, Executive Director ARTICLE 19.

The only exceptions to Article 19 which are potentially relevant in this case are the rights and reputations of others, national security and public order – all of which are inappropriate justifications in this particular case.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Nepalese government and security services to concede that non-violent demonstrations are in no way a threat to public security and that ethnic-Tibetan refugees should not be harassed and threatened with expulsion from Nepal on the grounds that their speech is politically sensitive.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.