

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

41st session, 28th of June

Object: Item 3 – Clustered interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women

ORAL INTERVENTION OF PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL SWITZERLAND

Speaker: Kim-Mai Vu

Presentation of the the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women on her visit to Nepal.

Mr President,

Peace Brigades International & the Nepal Monitor Project welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women on her visit to Nepal.

In Nepal, the high level of reported gender-based violence, especially rape, as well as a culture of silence and impunity around violence against women, in addition to ongoing practices such as child marriage, chaupadi¹ and beliefs about witchcraft², present a challenging environment for women human rights defenders.

They face a wide range of direct threats as a result of their work, such as arrests, assaults, sexual violence and killings. Recently, women human rights defenders have also faced abuse, harassment and smear campaigns online. Furthermore, there is currently a lack of appropriate legislation, political will and police capacity to effectively address these threats.

Women human rights defenders can easily find themselves isolated when pursuing a case that is against the interests of a specific group in a position of power. The case of the rape and murder of Nirmala Panta³, which has resulted in national attention, protest and action, is exceptional in that regard, whilst the culture of impunity it illustrates is not⁴. The violent response to protests about the case, which have been driven by women human rights defenders, demonstrate a strong resistance to women campaigning for accountability.

Moreover, PBI and the NMP are extremely concerned about the safety of those involved in the trial of Nirmala Panta's case, and specifically the lawyers belonging to COCAP, who work closely with the victims in this case, after a series of threats were allegedly made against them.

The Government of Nepal needs to take all necessary measures to guarantee the security of women human rights defenders and challenge the culture of impunity. It is also crucial that all the persons directly or indirectly involved in the Nirmala Panta case, including judicial officials, other legal professionals, victims and witnesses be protected.

Thank you.

¹ See <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2134278/period-shaming-nepal-new-law-may-finally-end>

² See <http://localnepaltoday.com/the-dark-side-of-local-traditional-beliefs/>

³ See "Locals demand justice for Nirmala Panta in Jarjarkort" <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/20703>, "Kailai women protest demanding justice for Nirmala Pant" <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/20826> and "Women in Khotang rally for Nirmala" <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/20701>

⁴ For an overview of key aspects of the case see <http://english.onlinekhabar.com/explainer-what-is-the-nirmala-pant-murder-case-all-about.html>