



February 2010 Issue 1



## TAKE THE LEAD

### What do you aspire for ?

- Solidarity towards Gender equality and women rights
- Prevention, care and counseling for sexual diseases/infections
- Family free of domestic violence
- Secure future
- Legal counseling services
- Awareness
- Health and education
- Skill development training
- Participation in awareness programs against human trafficking
- Rehabilitation and reintegration of internally displaced people
- Co-ordination and partnership for conflict free society

We are with you, come let us collectively move forward

### Editorial Board

Ms. Menuka Thapa  
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### Special Thanks

Bea Puerta Santos

## From the President's desk

Development of human civilization is a continuous process. This process has enabled human civilization to take a leap and progress. Ironically, on one hand where development brings benefits, it also brings along with it many vices. Forced sex trade, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking are some of many such vices.

Human trafficking refers to the process of buying and selling of human mostly for sex work or sex slavery. Women and girls in a developing country like Nepal are under deprivation as a result of the patriarchal value system, which is coupled with internal conflict, domestic violence, illiteracy, unemployment, and political, social and economic inequality. As a result of such deprivation, many women are forced to embrace sex work as their only source of livelihood, which has become a matter of concern for the nation.

When human rights are equally applicable to male and female, my question is why do we not raise the issues of male trafficking? Why does the society always blame women? Why are the so called change makers of the society silent on the issue? Raksha Nepal came into being to get answers to these questions, to break the silence of those responsible in the society, and to empower women who have been harassed physically, psychologically and economically.

Since its establishment in 2004 AD, Raksha Nepal has been studying the status of women and girls working in places like dance bars, massage parlors, and *dohori saanjh* restaurants that are operating unsystematically in the capital. Based on the findings and the requirement of those women and girls, the organization has been providing them with alternative employment. We are committed to provide respectable and sustainable employment, because we believe that unless internal

trafficking and sex trade are put to an end, efforts to eradicate external trafficking are pointless.

We empathize with women who have fallen prey to trafficking, and request the responsible Nepalese citizens, and development workers to show solidarity in our initiative to free women from sex trade and create a safe and healthy future for them. We will be discussing more on our activities, programs, and plans in the future editions of this newsletter. We request everyone to show concern towards and understand this issue in depth.

Sex work is not a desired occupation for Nepalese women and pushing them into forced sex trade is not acceptable to them. It is important that we come together to protect the dignity and self-respect of Nepalese women. Let us put an end to discrimination done against women in the name of different occupations by addressing social ills like conflict, domestic violence, inequality, unemployment and illiteracy.

On an end note, I would like to acknowledge the support provided to us by Canadian Co-operation Office (CCO/CIDA). Without their grant, we would never have been able to publish this newsletter, which we call "An Initiative." It certainly is an initiative, and we are deeply obliged to CCO for joining hands with us to take this issue on a higher level, and make a difference.

Menuka Thapa  
President

# Advocacy And Rehabilitation Program For Sexually Exploited Girl Children

## Working In Massage Parlors: Something About The Project

The decade long armed conflict in Nepal, compelled many men and women to leave their villages, and flee to the surrounding jungles or melt into the urban areas of the country, resulting in staggering number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs). The prime cause of such displacement was increasing violence in villages, harassment, and intense political pressure from the rebels and government security forces.

Even after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2006, internal displacement has continued to be a major problem owing to widespread poverty, lack of security, and intimidation by armed groups. Of the 70,000 IDPs, 50 percent are reported to be women and girls, who came to city in search of better lives, but got nothing more than empty stomachs and insecure future. There are cases of displaced young girls below 16 years of age being sexually exploited in massage parlors, dance restaurants, and hotels in Kathmandu. The problems that internally displaced women face are many, ranging from psychological trauma to sexual abuse. Since displacement has altered the structures of families, and households and has changed gender roles, women flee into uncertainty and often into danger, as they have to fend for themselves and support their dependents with few resources. Poverty, homelessness, and lack of any other income-generating activity have forced these women into sex trade, where they are at a high risk of suffering from Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including HIV and AIDS.

Raksha Nepal (RN), with support from the Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO) successfully implemented a project entitled Rehabilitation Program for Displaced and Sexually Exploited Women during 2007/08. The project surveyed and provided counseling

services to 200 sexually exploited and internally displaced women and girls, of whom 50 were rehabilitated by providing vocational skills. During implementation of the previous project, it was found that girls as young as 11 years of age were exploited by dance bars, massage parlors and cabin restaurants. These girls are in immediate need to be rescued from this profession, particularly from massage parlors, and rehabilitated. It is equally important to bring the reality in front of the general public, lobby with the government agencies, and work with law enforcing agencies and police to prevent the happening of such cases in the future.

Raksha Nepal has realized the grave situation of girls, especially those between 11 to 16 years of age, who are forced to be involved in sex work. RN, with support from CCO, in coordination with the concerned authorities and police has been organizing an advocacy campaign to control such practices, pressurize the government to adopt a strict policy, and make general public aware of the situation. Additionally, RN provides temporary shelter to children who are in immediate need, and later rehabilitates them.

Raksha Nepal (RN) is currently providing assistance to the girls working in massage parlors. The field workers of RN visited every massage parlor in the valley and motivated the girls working there to visit to the office of RN. Many of those girls have come in contact with RN, and are benefitting from different activities of the organization. RN provides them with psycho-social counseling, organizes awareness sessions on human rights, women rights, child rights and health related rights. Also, RN guides them through the process of joining schools and cooperatives, provides them with skills enhancement training, and rehabilitates them.



## Media: A tool to advocate

Media, as the fifth organ of the nation is a powerful tool to bring different issues of social importance to the attention of the people. Media can contribute a lot to a society- it can change opinions and bring social change. The power of media can transform the whole society, and educate people on issues ranging from women's rights, HIV and AIDS, and many more. Media can be the target, ally and tool in gender and media advocacy. It has proved to be an effective tool to carry anti-human trafficking campaign, decreasing the number of victims of compulsive sex work.

Media advocacy is one of the best ways to gain the attention of decision makers, general public, police and government, both local and national. Realizing this power of media, Raksha Nepal has joined hands with media houses to raise awareness on issues such as human trafficking, and sex trade. The organization has been broadcasting a program on the issues of Compulsive sex work. The program is being broadcasted from two audio media- Mero FM 93.5 MHz on Tuesday evenings from 5:00 to 5:30 FM, and Image FM 97.9 MHz on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 7:00 PM.

The program, that was aired for the first time in December 2009, will be on air for an year, and will encompass a series of discussion with representatives from political parties, Constituent Assembly (CA) members, human and women right activists, students and youth group, government agencies, police, media, and civil society organizations. Additionally, girls and women rescued from massage parlors will also be invited to interact with women's rights activists. Such kind of interaction will stimulate debate and discussion on all forms of discrimination against women and girls working as sex workers. Rather than giving a blind opinion, the program will also help the general public make a judgmental viewpoint on legalizing the sex industry in the country.

By inviting government officials, CA members, police officers, politicians, women and human rights activists, and victims, Raksha Nepal aims to lobby against sexual exploitation of children and expose the nexus between security forces, people in power, and owners of centers where girls have been sexually exploited.

Since the program will be aired all over the country, it will attract a large numbers of listeners, which will ultimately result in the formation of listeners' club. Members of the listeners club will send in their queries and help in raising awareness on the issue in their respective areas. With the use of media, Raksha Nepal aims at widening the reach of the issue to public and pressure the state to be accountable for the management of the problems associated with compulsive sex work. Through the program, Raksha Nepal envisions a community that will work towards further change, and amplify voices that the policy makers cannot ignore.



## Case study: Wound of conflict

Maya\*, 14 originally from Nuwakot lived with her family in Lalitpur district where her family earned their living through their garment factory. Her father, who was inspired with the Maoist's ideologies, joined the rebelling party as the commander to fight against the state army. Bad luck struck her at the age of eight when her father and brother (uncle's son) died in crossfire. Her mother was forced to marry the man with whom she was alleged to have an illicit relationship after Maya's father was killed.

Maya started living with her stepfather and step sisters, and later joined the Maoist Army, also as the commander, not only to felicitate her father's contribution to the party, but also to give justice to his death. Eventually, she lost interest in the party after she saw the discrimination and the sexual exploitation that girls and women faced in the party. After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), 2007 between the state and the Maoists Army, she returned back to her village with the hope of reintegrating, but was considered neither by the state nor the Maoists.

With no education and skills, she had no way to have her ends meet, and sponsor her sisters' education. She then decided to move to Kathmandu after her neighbors suggested her to join their massage parlor in the city. She had no knowledge of the kind of work she would have to perform there until once day when she was forced to have sex with a customer much older to her. With little information and no way to escape, she carried on her job accepting it as her fate. One day, however, she came in contact with the field worker of Raksha Nepal, who rescued her and brought her to Raksha Nepal Women Shelter. Her life has been better since then.

*After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), 2007 between the state and the Maoists Army, she returned back to her village with the hope of reintegrating, but was considered neither by the state nor the Maoists.*

\*Pseudonym used to protect identity

# About the organization

Raksha Nepal, established in the year 2004, is an initiative for women empowerment. It is the outcome of organized efforts of women and girls displaced due to conflict and those who are working with high risk of exploitation. The organization is run by enthusiastic, dedicated and devoted youth members who are committed towards maintaining good governance, transparency and accountability in the overall process of the organization.

Raksha Nepal believes that if a woman is capable, the entire family becomes capable. This is one of the many reasons that the organization is determined and committed to work towards the overall welfare of women involved in compulsive sex work. This, we believe, will prevent the daughters from following the path of their mothers.

## Major Activities/Programs

**STD Prevention:** Through counseling, discussions, seminars, workshops and informational handouts, Raksha raises awareness about safe sex, HIV/STD prevention, and the legal rights of women.

**Research and Survey:** Raksha conducts surveys for women from our target group around Kathmandu, with a focus on those working in Thamel. These surveys are helpful in identifying the magnitude of abuse and the best way to address it.

**Coordination with Media:** Raksha, in coordination with the media, focuses on issues of women in order to attract concern of all the stakeholders. Such coordination also helps in identifying solutions to the existing problems faced by girls/women working in places with high risk of sexual exploitation.

**Training Programs:** Raksha offers different trainings to empower the women. The trainings include leadership development, income generation and skill enhancement. After completion of the trainings, Raksha provides some seed money to the trainees to set up their own business.

**Raksha Shree Cooperative:** In collaboration with women involved in the entertainment sector, Raksha established a saving and credit cooperative named Raksha Shree Cooperative. The aim of the cooperative is to make micro-credit accessible to a larger group so that they can start their own business.

**Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program:** After completing different awareness classes and trainings, Raksha either rehabilitates them through job placement or reintegrates them in their family/community (creating a conducive environment), according to the will of the women. Fifty women received trainings under this program: 20 in beauty services, 15 in tailoring, 10 in taxi driving and 5 in mobile repairing. After completing their 3-6 months long classes, these women received micro credits to begin their own businesses.

**Counseling:** Raksha Nepal has been providing free counseling to the beneficiaries. Services like psycho-social counseling, trauma counseling is provided to the victims either individually or in groups. This boosts their confidence and builds their capacity.

**Women's School:** Raksha has been supporting the girls/women deprived from education by running two women's schools in different locations of Kathmandu.

**Educational Support:** Raksha has been providing financial support to educate the children displaced by conflict and without families, or the children of sexually abused mothers.



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Tune in to: Mero FM 93.5 MHz on Tuesday evenings from 5:00 to 5:30 PM, and Image FM 97.9 MHz on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 7:00 PM

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