

# South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > BHUTAN UPDATE NO 15: Disappointing performance of the verification team

---

## **BHUTAN UPDATE NO 15: Disappointing performance of the verification team**

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Fri, 09/21/2012 - 08:11

**Note No. 125**

**11.04.2001**

**by Dr. S. Chandrasekharan**

It was nearly after a decade of waiting, that the hundred thousand and odd Bhutanese refugees in Nepal saw some hope when Bhutan and Nepal agreed to start field verification of the refugees in the tenth round of talks between the two countries. But the way in which the teams of both countries are proceeding with the verification, it looks as if it will take another decade for the refugees to go back to their homes in Bhutan if at all Bhutan accepts the results of the verification teams. This is not what the refugees who already have spent ten years in wilderness and who have so far refrained from taking any collective pro active role, expected. For this situation both Bhutan and Nepal are responsible.

It is agreed by all that there are over 100,000 refugees in the camps in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal. Assuming that there are on an average six members in a family there would be a minimum of 16000 (sixteen thousand) families. If the Joint verification teams have a target of verifying 10 families a day, it would take 1600 days to complete verification and taking 300 days a year it is going to take 5 years and four months first to complete. Then would come the crucial part of categorising the refugees into the four slots agreed to, between the governments and then the actual repatriation to take place. Though not quantifiable right now, it may take another few years. To put it mildly, it is a fraud that is being perpetrated on the poor refugees by both the governments..

There are other problems that have arisen in the verification. The teams from both countries consist of five members each barely enough, even to verify ten families a day. We understand that most of the time not more than seven families are being verified. On March 26 when the process started only two families were verified on that day. The families are being taken in a bus five at a time from Khujunabari camp to the office of JVT 40 kilometres away. It is said that the families are not being provided food and other facilities though they have to remain the whole day. The surprise was that the leader of the

Nepalese team declared " We had never imagined that the process would be slow." Apparently no home work was done by the Joint Secretary. Luckily for the refugees, the Joint secretary Usha Nepal, from the Ministry of Home affairs, Nepal has been asked to file her retirement papers and another Sushil Kumar Rana has been posted.

If both Nepal and Bhutan are serious about solving the problem, they should do the following.

- \* A time limit of a year and a half for verification should be mutually agreed to and another six months could be taken to compile the results and immediate implementation.
- \* This will be possible only if the strength of the verification teams is increased from 5 each to ten or more and there should be more than one nodal point for verification. The ideal would be to retain Damak to verify the inmates of Sanichari and Beldangi camps and another at Biratmode for the Khujhunabari, Ti-mai and Goldhap camps. The alternative could be for the verification teams to go to the camps each day and verify. This would save time for the refugee families which take two hours to reach the JVT office.
- \* A minimum of fifty families should be verified each day. This is possible.
- \* Food and other facilities should be provided to the refugee families who are brought to the office. It is pathetic to see the leader of the Nepalese team declaring that they would "welcome any agency desirous of providing the refugees with food and other facilities at the JVT Office." Both Nepal and Bhutan should bear the cost.

It is doubtful if they will do it on their own unless persuaded by others. India will not do as it still considers the refugee question not as a human problem, but as a political bilateral problem. The US government which pushed both countries before the start of the tenth round of talks, to accept a compromise formula on the unit of verification between individuals and families cannot again intervene when the new Bush regime is still to formulate its position on the problem. Perhaps UNHCR which has been closely associated with the refugee relief and is in touch with the two governments could. There is already pressure from various NGOs on UNHCR to take a more active role in the verification.

In the terms of reference agreed to, between Nepal and Bhutan, there is no provision for an independent monitoring unit and UNHCR has no role to play in monitoring, facilitating the verification and repatriation process. If two responsible governments deliberately or otherwise delay the verification, what is the remedy?

Five NGOs, the Human Rights watch, Lutheran World Federation, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Refugees International and the Bhutanese Refugee Support Group have strongly urged both the governments to review their decision and let UNHCR take a more formal and active role. The reasons given are

- \* The verification process gets more credibility.
- \* It could be ensured that verification and repatriation conform to international standards.
- \* UNHCR could serve as a referral point in the event of any disagreement or difficulty that may arise during the verification.
- \* UNHCR could also play a critical role in the dissemination of information about the verification procedures and general awareness in the refugee camps.
- \* It could help in voluntary repatriation with the expertise UNHCR had obtained in dealing with refugees in other countries.

Getting UNHCR to play an active and formal role would amount to "mediation" between Nepal and Bhutan. This will not be to the liking of India, but it cannot remain aloof from the problem and still expect others not to intervene to obtain an early and equitable solution.

It is in the interest of Bhutan to expedite the verification process rather than allow the problem to drag on for many years, in the hope that the problem in due course will solve by itself when the refugees lose all hope of returning and look for alternatives.

There is a growing concern in Bhutan about the presence of ULFA and BODO camps in the southern hills with potential to cause widespread law and order problems. India appears to be pressing Bhutan to have joint operations to eliminate the camps. Kuensels of Feb 17 and March 17 have openly expressed the view that Bhutan is running out options on the militant problem. Can Bhutan handle two problems at the same time?

Most of the Bhutanese Refugees who feel discriminated and stripped of their rights to remain in Bhutan have a dream to return home with honour and dignity. Will it remain only a dream? We hope not.

**Category:**

Notes <sup>[1]</sup>

**Countries:**

Bhutan <sup>[2]</sup>

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/note125>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/notes>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/bhutan>