

Thematic Report
Peace Brigades International -
Nepal



Between Rocks and Hard Places:
*The Situation for
Women Human Rights Defenders
in Dhanusha District, Nepal*





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WE THANK:

Emilie Aubert, Tracy Baumgardt,
Cecilia Deme, Bernhard
Emmerich, Jessica Johnston,
Grainne Kilcullen, Iona Liddell,
Markus Morawietz, Adele
Morreale and Christopher Shier.

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Cover image – PBI volunteers listening to WHRDs

Introduction

Across Nepal, thousands of women are working for human rights. These Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) most commonly work unrecognized and unrewarded, risking family lives, and at times their own lives. How dangerous or hard their work is depends on a host of factors, including caste, ethnic background, education and whether or not their family supports them. Social attitudes towards women vary across Nepal and can hugely impact the safety and efficacy of WHRDs. And all of these factors are compounded by the overall security situation in the area in which they work, which has a significant impact on the ability of WHRDs to carry out their work in relative safety. The security of WHRDs is the responsibility of the Nepali State and as such, positive change *is* possible in the short term. This report looks at the situation for WHRDs in Nepal and makes recommendations for such change.

Why Dhanusha District?

In September 2009 Peace Brigades International (PBI) conducted preliminary research¹ in order to ascertain the districts in Nepal that are most insecure for human rights defenders (HRDs) and WHRDs. Dhanusha was revealed to be a district of high concern with regards to HRDs-at-risk. This was particularly so for WHRDs (as identified by WOREC, a national women's rights organization). PBI has been working periodically in Dhanusha since 2006, and specifically with WHRDs there between October 2010 and April 2011.

This report is based on field analysis conducted in 2010 and 2011 by PBI on the situation faced by WHRDs in Dhanusha district, Central Nepal. Throughout this period, PBI ran a pilot project to look at the needs of WHRDs and conduct activities designed to meet these needs. On the request of WHRDs in Dhanusha, PBI held a series of security and human rights trainings with more than 60 WHRDs² from six different Village District Committees³ (VDCs) within Dhanusha district. These trainings

¹ In 2009 PBI surveyed key organisations about the districts most insecure for HRDs/WHRDs. The following organisations were consulted: Protection Desk Nepal (PDN), Federation for Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) and Advocacy Forum (AF). Dhanusha was mentioned by 4 out of 6 of these organisations as a district of high concern with regards to HRDs at risk.

also served as consultation meetings, as the WHRDs were asked to detail the challenges and obstacles they face whilst carrying out, and as a result of, their human rights work. Together with PBI Nepal's accumulated knowledge from work with WHRDs over the past five years, this first-hand information has been used to analyse the challenges and obstacles WHRDs face while working on cases of grassroots human rights violations in the central Terai. The report also gives an insight into how WHRDs perceive challenges and serves as a platform through which their voices can be heard. Whilst the report is geographically specific, the challenges faced by the WHRDs will find reflections in many other parts of Nepal. It is hoped that by describing these challenges, highlighting gaps in protection and suggesting concrete steps that can be made to address these the report can also go beyond Dhanusha district and contribute to wider discussions about the protection and support of WHRDs in Nepal and around the world.

The *first section* gives a brief overview of the **security situation** in Dhanusha district and looks at the **obstacles and challenges** resulting for HRDs and WHRDs.

The *second section* **defines WHRDs** and explains the need for the distinction. It illustrates the **activities** that WHRDs at the village level carry out, and demonstrates how, through these, WHRDs challenge the patriarchal social structure in the Terai.

The *third section* describes the **sociocultural situation** in Dhanusha district and draws out the **gendered obstacles and challenges** that WHRDs in Dhanusha district face while carrying out their work.

The *fourth section* looks at **the nature of the threats and abuse** which WHRDs in Dhanusha receive and gives an overview of those who may carry these out - **the repressive actors**. The **risk assessment** that follows analyses the capacities that repressive actors have to act upon their threats. It also looks at the **vulnerabilities** of WHRDs, as well as the **capacities** to lessen risk - taking into account the different security strategies that WHRDs have developed for their own safety.

² All of these women were members of the district's WHRD network, which is run by WOREC. For the sake of security, they will remain anonymous in this report.

³ VDCs are village level governance units within all of Nepal's districts. Their purpose is to enhance grassroots access to the political process by offering committee members a level of autonomy in local decisions concerning such issues as education and basic health care. VDCs are further subdivided into wards.

The *fifth section* goes on to highlight the **gaps in protection** that are beyond the control of WHRDs and suggests what could be done.

The report concludes with **recommendations**, which could be carried out to fill the protection gaps and decrease the vulnerabilities of Dhanusha's WHRDs.

1. The Security Situation in Dhanusha



Nepal is made up of seventy five districts divided between five development regions. Dhanusha district is located in the south of the Central Development Region on the Terai plains of Nepal, which border India.

Famed for being home to two significant Hindu temples in the district capital, Janakpur, and the unique Maithila art form, latter years Dhanusha district has also been known for its high levels of insecurity. At the time of research, Dhanusha was one of the country's least secure districts, with the highest number of killings out of all 15 Terai districts.⁴

During Nepal's 10-year civil conflict, the activities of armed Maoists, state security forces and militias determined the relative safety level of any particular area. In 2006, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) brought the conflict to an official end, but peace, in the form of an absence of armed violence, has proved elusive. In practical terms, this has largely been due to the failure of the state, through its police force, to implement the rule of law.⁵ Continuing blanket impunity for all conflict era crimes has affected contemporary attitudes towards law and policing. In the Terai, the end of the conflict left a relatively weak police force, open

⁴Interdisciplinary Analysts, Nepal Madhes Founda on, Small Arms Survey and Saferworld, *Armed Violence in the Terai*, August 2011: 16

Available at: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/E-Co-Publica ons/SAS-Saferworld-2011-armed-violence-in-the-Terai.pdf>

⁵*Ibid* : 37

to corruption. This contributed to a power vacuum which allowed nexuses of criminal activity to emerge. In place of the conflict's adversaries, new interest groups vie for power. Political parties, businessmen and local authorities struggle for supremacy and wealth. They have been joined in recent years by an upsurge of armed groups.

Armed Groups

In 2009 the Government of Nepal announced that there were **110 armed groups** within Nepal. Of these 110, 12 were deemed motivated by a political cause.⁶ The others are guns for hire – small armed groups who carry out criminal activities in the Terai and take advantage of the open border with India to evade capture - the apparent low levels of cooperation between Indian and Nepali border forces making this all the easier.⁷ Operating with ease and a degree of immunity, armed groups have terrorised local populations.

Police Response

The Nepal Police have, on the surface, responded to this insecurity with a '**Special Security Plan**' (SSP). Launched in 2009, this plan was variously said to have actually given police more powers to act, or to merely empower police to take action within their current remit.⁸ Whatever the case, it seems there is a lack of clarity as to what actions police were allowed to carry out under the act. Equipment and personnel resources do not appear to have been part of this plan. After the plan's implementation, human rights groups observed and recorded the first **increases in extra-judicial killings** in the Terai since the end of the conflict in 2006.⁹ The authorities claim the victims were killed during armed shoot-outs, known as 'encounters'.¹⁰ Victims are mostly young, male and allegedly members of armed groups. OHCHR investigated the

⁶ *Nepal home ministry report says only 12 out of 110 armed groups political* in Thaindian news, September 2009

Available at: http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/nepal-home-ministry-report-says-only-12-out-of-110-armed-groups-political_100243972.html

⁷ Meeting at District Police Office, Dhanusha District, April 2010

⁸ Meetings with the Human Rights Cell of Nepal Police, Kathmandu, 2009

⁹ Interdisciplinary Analysts, Nepal Madhes Foundation, Small Arms Survey and Saferworld, *Armed Violence in the Terai, Op. Cit.*

allegations of extra-judicial killings in the Terai and identified nine cases of extra-judicial killings in Dhanusha district alone between January 2008 and June 2010.¹¹ They in turn acknowledge that non-governmental human rights organisations in Nepal, such as the Democratic Freedom and Human Rights Institute (DFHRI) have reported even higher numbers. DFHRI states in an updated report that 31 people had allegedly been killed in 'encounters' in Dhanusha between January 2007 and May 2010. Of these, 17 had been victims of the state authorities.¹²

Armed Groups Weakened

Since the introduction of the Special Security Plan, the activities of criminal armed groups have significantly decreased.¹³ This is likely to be the result of a combination of the lack of concrete agendas of most of these groups, power struggles leading to fragmentation, but also without doubt the detentions and deaths as a result of the Special Security Plan. However, despite the overall decline in armed group activity, extortions and abductions are still pervasive. The capacity of armed group members to inflict significant violence remains intact. Members of the public are often too afraid to report abuses made by criminal armed outfits, due to fear of reprisals. The state security forces frequent failure to provide proper security for victims and witnesses encourages this culture of silence, and further boosts civilian mistrust of police. With state security forces unable to provide proper security to individuals, civilians arm themselves with weapons for their own security.

Criminal Nexuses

It is clear that the situation as described above could present security concerns for HRDs. But the HRDs point out that the risks for them are in fact much higher than they would appear. This is because, in Dhanusha district, the divisions between the major players (police, armed groups, businessmen and political parties) are not always as clear-cut as the Special Security Plan makes out. In 2010, the suspicions of many were

¹⁰An 'encounter' killing in its true sense occurs when police and armed criminals engage in combat in open public spaces. Armed criminals, police or civilians killed during such a battle would be described as having suffered an 'encounter' killing. The phrase has taken on a more ominous tone in recent years as it has come to be the official description given by police to what, in reality, appear to be extra-judicial killings carried out whilst a suspect is in police custody.

¹¹OHCHR, *Investigating Allegations of Extra-Judicial Killings in the Terai*, Nepal Summary of Concerns, July 2010: 18

¹²Dipendra Jha, Sanjaya Aryal, *Widespread Killings in Terai- updated report*, June 2011

¹³All of the human rights organisations PBI interviewed agree with the authorities that the activities of armed groups has gone down significantly.

confirmed when the then Deputy Superintendent of Police of Dhanusha district was transferred from his post as a result of having been exposed as “at the centre of a “nexus” of criminal activity, which was widely suspected to also include armed group members and political party cadres”.¹⁴ From anecdotal HRDs and police accounts, it appears this is far more the norm than an exception.

Political Interference

Many people with whom PBI spoke in Dhanusha pointed to the crippling effect that political party members can have on society at the district and village levels. Compared to the impoverished police force, political party members often have far more clout. As a result, political interference within police investigations is a widespread phenomenon. In return for the political allegiance of a criminal, political party cadres will pressure the police into dropping a particular case or releasing the suspect from detention.

Culture of Impunity

Impunity related to conflict-era crimes has extended far beyond the conflict. Rather than the law dictating justice, as apportioned by courts, and assisted by the police force, relationships of power and patronage decide outcomes. Across Nepal, perpetrators can be protected and backed by political cadres in positions of influence. Police can be paid off to drop cases, and petty criminals can be hired to threaten and intimidate HRDs and their families. Advocating for justice and an engagement to make perpetrators accountable for human rights violations is a huge challenge when working in an atmosphere of widespread impunity. The following quotation illustrates how WHRDs in Dhanusha try to overcome impunity in a context of bribery and political interference.

“Sometimes the police do investigate cases, however politically influential families can hinder that process. If we witness such an external interference, we sit in front of the court and protest non-violently. For example, in one case in which a woman has been killed in disputes over the dowry¹⁵ the police didn’t file the case, but after we showed up, the police complied. But, following the arrest

¹⁴ DSP Nyaupane suspended for four months in Nepalnews, June 2010
Available at: <http://www.nepalnews.com/home/index.php/news/19/6994-dsp-nyaupane-suspended-for-four-months.html>;
Meeting with SP Surendra Khanal, Janakpur, April 2010

*of the perpetrators he managed to bribe the court and was set free. We took this case to the Appellate Court. Finally the victim's family won the case, but the perpetrator is still free, as the police have not implemented the court's decision."*¹⁶

Institutional weakness of the criminal justice system, arising from political interference, corruption, a lack of resources and severe erosion of the system itself resulting from the decade-long conflict, must be addressed if human rights are to have a chance of being realized in practice.

1.2 Obstacles and Challenges for HRDs and WHRDs Resulting from the Security Situation

Human rights defenders working in pursuit of human rights and justice within this environment face many challenges. The varying inter-relationships between criminal armed outfits, political parties and state security forces limit the space in which HRDs are able to carry out their work safely and effectively. The overall situation of insecurity creates a skewed form of justice, decided through power struggles between state and non-state actors. HRDs are caught in the middle, trying to uphold human rights.

Lack of Support from Police

- HRDs are often stonewalled when attempting to lodge complaints with the Nepal Police on behalf of a victim of a human rights violation. This could be a result of pressure exerted on the police, whether from political parties or higher within the ranks (if the case is conflict-related). In part it is through attitude; WHRDs spoke throughout the consultations of being regularly told by police that incidents of domestic violence were 'small matters' and should be dealt with in private at home – more on this in *section 3*.
- If the police do file a First Information Report (FIR) and make an arrest, political pressure may see the accused perpetrator released before investigation or trial.

¹⁵ Dowry is "the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband or his family in marriage. Most common in cultures that are strongly patrilineal and that expect women to reside with or near their husband's family (patrilocality), dowries have a long history in Europe, South Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world." Britannica Encyclopedia.

Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/170540/dowry>

¹⁶ Meeting with a WHRD, Janakpur, June 2011.

- In instances where accused perpetrators are released as a result of pressure, HRDs are made significantly more vulnerable by being suddenly confronted by those whom they have accused. The general tendency within the Nepal Police to forgo comprehensive and unbiased investigations and prosecutions presents an opportunity for repressive actors to seriously threaten and harm the personal security of HRDs.
- WHRDs reported feeling unable to rely on the police as a source of protection from threats and intimidations - particularly if these threats came from people with connections to armed groups or political party members. HRDs in Dhanusha necessarily spend much time travelling between villages in rural areas within the district on fact-finding missions. They are an easy target for potential aggressors, especially whilst travelling at night, in remote areas or alone.

Interference from Non-state Actors

- Without the rule of law in place, the general public on occasion supports heavy-handed policing over criminality. When HRDs stand up for the human rights of all, including those of accused criminals, they put themselves at variance to public opinion. Without the protective backing of the state security forces, they become targets for slander and abuse.
- WHRDs spoke of incidents in which victims and their families had turned against them out of frustration borne from lack of police support. They accused WHRDs of falsely leading them to believe that the WHRDs could help them.
- Underground armed groups practice extortion to supplement their living. HRDs can become targets through an assumption that they work for NGOs and have access to money. A WHRD in Dhanusha shared such an experience:

"My husband and my family are targeted by these people. This is my weak point. They approach me because I work for an NGO and am a school teacher. They think I have money. They made a donation demand, to be fulfilled within 24 hours. My son is 16 years old. I sent him to India 10 months ago because I was

concerned about his safety. I informed the police indirectly about it and they gave me an escort for one week, but I'm very afraid to tell the police about threats coming from underground armed groups.”¹⁷

2. Unpacking the Term ‘Women Human Rights Defender’

The definition of a 'human rights defender' is enshrined in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.¹⁸ The phrase 'woman human rights defender' (WHRD) was coined in recognition of the additional gendered risks, abuses and consequences of abuse which a woman defending human rights may face. Recognizing these is the first step towards creating protection mechanisms that work.¹⁹

How these gendered risks, abuses and consequences of abuses play out are largely due to the social context²⁰ – specifically societal attitudes towards women. In communities which have a conservative patriarchal view of a woman's place in society, like many in Nepal, the risks for a woman carrying out human rights work in public can be significant. This is so because in order to defend the human rights of others, a WHRD must step out of her socially acceptable gender role by conducting fact-finding missions that might necessitate her being outside and alone at irregular hours. She will need to raise her voice either physically or in writing, and venture into what are traditionally male spaces, such as public offices. The risk increases manifold if the focus of her work is on defending women's rights, as in both her actions and her work she would present a challenge to the patriarchal status quo. This report focuses on women in this latter category, who are defending women's rights at the grassroots level.

A 'woman human rights defender' is any woman who stands up for the rights of others. In the Nepali context, she could be a lawyer working on a disappearance case, a journalist writing about the right to protest, or an illiterate housewife helping her neighbour file a case against an abusive

¹⁷ Meeting with a WHRD, Janakpur, June 2011.

¹⁸ The full title is: “UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>

¹⁹ During its work in Dhanusha PBI did not encounter any WHRDs working on LGBT rights issues. However, it should be acknowledged that the obstacles, which LGBT rights defenders encounter in Dhanusha district and the Terai in general, are significant and make them another very vulnerable group.

²⁰ These can be lessened and/or mitigated depending on police response, implementation of protection mechanisms and awareness campaigns.

husband. Most of the WHRDs PBI was in contact with in rural areas of Dhanusha district started out simply as villagers who observed injustice and pervasive impunity in relation to instances of domestic violence. Many were prompted to take action when a family member or neighbour experienced some form of gender abuse. These women provided moral support to the victims and, in many cases, assisted the victim to seek legal redress.

Throughout Dhanusha and across Nepal today, WHRDs are working courageously for the protection of human rights at the grassroots level, including the rights of minorities, the right of access to health and education, and sexual and reproductive rights. A WHRD in Dhanusha district who attended the interaction programme explained the motivation behind her activism:

"I am working as a WHRD in Dhanusha so that women don't have to face any kind of exploitation, threats or intimidation, dominance, violence, rape and for their protection in the society." ²¹

2.2 Activities of WHRDs in Dhanusha

Most WHRDs carry out their important work to protect human rights and challenge impunity on top of fulfilling their other responsibilities, such as working in their fields, household chores and taking care of their children and family. The work of WHRDs in Dhanusha for the protection of human rights in their own villages takes many forms:

Accompanying victims of domestic abuse or other crimes to the nearest police station to report the case and file a First Information Report²² (FIR) naming the perpetrators to hold them accountable for their action.

- Pressuring police to investigate the case by repeatedly visiting the police station and reminding officers to investigate thoroughly.
- Requesting the police to provide security for the victim, either by patrolling their house and area, or by speaking with involved parties who are threatening and intimidating the victim to withdraw the case.

²¹ Meeting with a WHRD, Dhanusha district, June 2011

- Providing moral support and counselling.
- Accompanying a victim to a safe house or other place of safety.
- Organising regular meetings with other WHRDs in the same area to exchange information about the cases they are working on and to discuss strategies on how to best support victims.
- Organising interaction programmes with the support of organisations such as the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC). Inviting HRDs and other civil society organisations to engage on occasions such as International Women's Day on 8th March and the launch of campaigns on women's issues.

3. Sociocultural Context in Dhanusha

Dhanusha district, where the research for this report was conducted, has a predominant Madheshi²³ population, of which the majority practice the Hindu religion. There is no unique definition of Madheshi, but rather different perceptions which remain controversial. However, the usual common points that can be found would be that they are the original inhabitants of Madhes²⁴ that include all those who are not of Pahadi or Himali origin. This definition seems to be based on the general perception in identifying Madheshis as the people of the Terai region or of recent Indian origin.²⁵

Attitudes towards Women

The designated role for women in Dhanusha district and across Nepal is traditionally that of homemaker. Women marry by arrangement of their families, often in their late teens, and become the main workforce within their husband's extended cohabiting family home. They are often powerless to shape or change the conditions in which they live. Many

²² Criminal procedure in Nepal requires FIRs to be registered at the police office nearest to the place where a criminal incident is alleged to have occurred.

²³ Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium, Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction, *Dhanusha District Profile*, 2010

Available at: <http://www.nrrc.org.np/where-we-work/district-profile.php?d=Dhanusha>

²⁴ The word Madhesh on the other hand implies more than a physical composition of the space that stretches across the southern belt of Nepal, but includes the cultural and lingual space that exists as a basis of identity amongst many people residing in the region. (Farah Cheah, *Inclusive Democracy for Madheshis: The Quest for Identity, Rights and Representation*, Institute of South Asian Studies, 2008 : 4 <http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/Attachments/ResearchAttachment/Report%20-%20Farah.pdf>)

²⁵ *ibid*

women are uneducated, as a result of social prejudice and poverty. In rural areas, women are not expected to take public roles and are viewed with suspicion or derision if they do so. The dowry system, whereby a woman's family gives substantial monetary and other gifts to the groom's family upon marriage, is still practiced despite being outlawed in Nepal in 2009. In many families, daughter-in-laws are treated in relation to how much dowry they brought with them at the time of their marriage. Domestic abuse is common, from husbands but also other members of the marital family, particularly in rural areas. In 2011, the Asia Foundation reported that "In Nepal, an estimated 81 percent of women in rural communities face recurring domestic violence."²⁶

The Caste System

The Hindu concept of 'caste', wherein society is segregated into groups that are ranked hierarchically, is still very much in practice in Nepal. The caste system consists of a set of rules determining which interactions are possible between different caste groups - from issues as varied as marriage, to trade and water usage. In Dhanusha, Maithili Brahmins constitute the highest ranking caste and, unsurprisingly, are also politically dominant. The practice of 'untouchability', whereby people from the so-called 'lowest' Dalit caste, are excluded from much of society remains widespread despite legal provisions against caste-discrimination.²⁷ People belonging to the Dalit caste in Dhanusha face particular discrimination in everyday life, being considered polluted and often only allowed to perform tasks that higher castes would not choose to undertake. This discrimination can be blatant, but is often an insidious undertone within interactions.

Women Human Rights Defenders from varying caste backgrounds work within this social context. Unlike female lawyers, journalists and women's rights activists working in Dhanusha district's capital, the sixty participants interviewed for the research of this report are all intimately involved in

²⁶ Diana Fernandez, *Tracking Gender-based Violence in Nepal*, 2011

Available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2011/01/19/tracking-gender-based-violence-in-nepal/>

²⁷ Nepal having ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, Article 13.32 of the 2007 Interim Constitution enshrining the right to equality, Article 14 mandating the punishment of such acts and compensation to victims; The Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Crime Elimination and Punishment Act, which was adopted unanimously by Nepal's interim Parliament on 25 May 2011.

defending women's rights at the village level. As such, their experience of challenging the patriarchy is much more extreme.

3.2 Obstacles and Challenges to WHRDs from the Sociocultural Context

The following section describes the obstacles and challenges WHRDs face while defying the existing social structure and seeking justice for human rights violations.

Gender Discrimination

Harassment from Non-state Actors

WHRDs in particular perceive a distinct lack of understanding and support for their work from their communities and often also their own families, both of whom would normally be sources of protective support for individuals. This is in large part due to conservative attitudes towards women within what is still a deeply patriarchal society in Nepal. In actively advocating against domestic violence and discrimination and proactively seeking justice by approaching security forces and community leaders, WHRDs challenge the norms and values behind the socially constructed role of 'woman'. As a result, WHRDs can face intimidation and harassment from both male and female villagers who are keen to see social 'norms' maintained. Harassment can also come from the WHRDs' own marital and/or maternal families if they feel that she is 'shaming' them through her work. Perpetrators or concerned villagers keen to uphold the social order often pressure the families of WHRDs into curtailing their activities.

WHRD working on a range of domestic violence cases shared that she regularly receives threats, intimidations and insults as a result of her work. These come from several prominent community leaders as well as from her husband and in-laws. The hostility against her increased when other women in the village asked her to tell them more about human rights work, and showed interest in supporting her. Various community leaders and other villagers approached her on different occasions saying things such as:

*"Why are you playing the leader? Most talented men are not the leader here, but you as a woman think you are. You are spoiling the other Maithili women! Stop doing this work, it is useless!"*²⁸

Lack of Support from Security Forces

Many personnel within the state security forces share the conservative view that WHRDs are stepping beyond their socially constructed female roles by challenging the values and norms of society. For this reason, police personnel rarely show any understanding and support for the defenders' work, further entrenching impunity and increasing the defenders' vulnerability. WHRDs are often ignored by police when they go to file cases at the police station, or told to leave without being assisted. In part this may be because the police receive pressure from the accused perpetrator, but may also be because police officers share the conservative social view that women should not be doing such work.

Despite the introduction of the Domestic Violence and Punishment Act on 27th April 2009²⁹ police officers in Dhanusha are for the most part still reluctant to implement it, instead preferring informal community settlements or mediation outside the formal justice system. Anecdotal evidence and interactions with Dhanusha police point to the fact that police officers view domestic violence as a 'normal', 'private' or 'small' matter³⁰ which should not be investigated by police.

Working in such a context, WHRDs frequently find themselves drawn into a grey area of mediation and negotiation away from legal norms. Some WHRDs reported that police actively encouraged that they use

²⁸ Meeting with a WHRD from a rural VDC who attended the security training conducted by Protection Desk Nepal and facilitated by PBI Nepal in January 2010, Dhanusha District, March 2010

²⁹ Under the Domestic Violence and Punishment Act 2065, domestic violence is defined as "physical, mental, sexual, financial as well as behavioral violence." Perpetrators will be subject under the Law to up to four months of imprisonment and a fine of NPR 6,000 (about US\$76); accomplices will receive half of the perpetrator's sentence. Where physical or psychological injury has been inflicted, the perpetrator will be responsible for bearing the costs of the victim's treatment. Repeat offenders will face double penalties for each new act of domestic violence perpetrated. Victims of domestic violence are to file a complaint with the police, the local government, or a women's commission within 90 days of being subjected to the act(s). Hearings on their cases will be in camera. Government-founded service centers will provide victims with security, treatment, and rehabilitation, as well as such services as legal aid and psychological counseling.

³⁰ Meeting with a WHRD about her interactions with police, Dhanusha District, June 2011; meetings with police, Dhanusha District, 2011

community mediation as a way to solve 'domestic' disputes. This is not a viable route for justice for the victim, as those who run such community sessions are influential men. This also places the WHRD in a vulnerable position. More subtly, police also often appear to employ delaying tactics on domestic violence cases, which have a seven day statute of limitation under which First Information Reports can be filed. Similarly, under current law, cases of sexual violence must be filed within 35 days of the event. Police are often reluctant to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of violence against WHRDs, in part due to pressure from perpetrators, but also as a result of an attitude that WHRDs bring such threats or attacks upon themselves by carrying out work that goes against social norms.

Refusing to file cases, encouraging community mediation, delaying investigation, releasing accused detainees early from custody and not reacting to protect WHRDs under threat are all actions which endanger WHRDs.

Case Study

A WHRD was working on a domestic violence case in which the family beat up the disabled daughter-in-law. On one occasion the family used so much violence that the WHRD from the village went to the police station together with the victim to file a First Information Report. Despite the existence of the Domestic Violence Act, which obliges the police to file and investigate the case, the officers opted to settle the case through community mediation. They gathered the community together and talked about this domestic violence case telling the father-in-law he should neither beat nor rape the victim since it is not a good thing for society. After the WHRDs failed attempt to file the case and the following community mediation, the alleged perpetrator paid around 15 people and has sent them several times to the WHRDs house at night to shout at her from outside. The WHRD described the situation:

"We are so scared. Sometimes we have to hide ourselves under our bed on the roof. Our neighbours know about this, but never come out of their house to help me. The mob may kill me someday. Now my family wants me to stop working on cases."³¹

Caste Discrimination

Discrimination on the basis of caste persists despite Nepal having ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). As such, WHRDs from a 'low' caste, particularly those with a Dalit background, face a further layer of social discrimination which leaves them more vulnerable to harassment.

The problem of caste discrimination becomes structural when access to justice for WHRDs with a Dalit background is made particularly difficult by state authorities who are more likely to disregard claims made by Dalit and other ethnic minorities.³²

Members of the public feel more emboldened to threaten WHRDs from lower-caste backgrounds, as there is awareness that it will be even harder for them to access assistance from the police.

3.3 Credibility

All of the above actions serve to deprive WHRDs of legitimacy, which both increases their vulnerability and reduces the efficacy of their work. Pervasive social views of women undermine the credibility of WHRDs, which is then further compounded by police not taking the cases they bring to the police station seriously. This publicly demonstrated lack of official support perpetuates the problem.

The root of this circular problem appears to be lack of recognition of - or refusal to acknowledge - women as human rights defenders. During a discussion within the consultations, WHRDs in Dhanusha gave many examples of this. One told how her detractors in the local area often asked her 'What is the proof that you are a WHRD? And what exactly are women's rights supposed to be?', as if to test her knowledge and show her up in public.

Another noted the vast differences in the way police personnel treated her and her male colleagues:

³¹Meeting with a WHRD in a debriefing session after the security training, Janakpur, January 2011

³²Neeta Thapa, *Country Profile of Excluded Groups in Nepal*, UNESCAP, 2009 : 27

"When a male HRD goes to the police station the police are polite and listen. In many cases the police register the cases that are forwarded by male HRDs. But the police don't register cases when we go to them. This is a very bitter feeling for us."

³³

Another concurred:

"Sometimes when we take a case to the police station they don't pay much attention. They just hand over the cases to villagers and the victim doesn't get justice." ³⁴

A fourth WHRD pointed out the repercussions such behaviour from authorities can have:

"Because of all this, even the victims sometimes do not believe that we are HRDs!" ³⁵

Gaining credibility is key to improving public perceptions of WHRDs. Crucially, WHRDs feel that there have been changes in Dhanusha in this regard and that, with assistance, further improvement is possible:

"In the early days of campaigning as WHRDs, we faced many challenges but now it seems that the police, community and political parties are a little more accepting of us. I put this down to our perseverance in public and also international recognition and pressure. Together we made them understand our work and campaigns." ³⁶

4. WHRDs under Threat

This section employs a threat analysis to take a closer look into the risks and gendered threats rights defenders are exposed to.³⁷ The tool initially identifies repressive actors, and analyses their **interests** and their **ability** to carry out violent or otherwise repressive acts in order to attain their interests. Balanced against this are the **capacities** of WHRDs in

³³Meeting with a WHRD, Dhanusha District, June 2011

³⁴Meeting with member of the WHRD Network, Dhanusha District, October 2010.

³⁵Meeting with a WHRD, Dhanusha District, November 2010

³⁶Meeting with a WHRD, Dhanusha District, June 2011.

³⁷PBI conducts regular risk analyses for the HRDs and WHRDs it works with. This tool is part of that process.

Dhanusha, including protection strategies they developed for their own safety, and their **vulnerabilities** – the presence or lack of certain things which make them more vulnerable to repression. To create a secure environment for the defenders it is important for them to be aware of their capacities and vulnerabilities. The vulnerabilities and capacities listed here were identified by around 60 WHRDs in Dhanusha while participating in a PBI-facilitated security training, conducted by Protection Desk - Nepal. Taking the results of this assessment as a starting point, it is possible for WHRDs and supportive actors to take actions aimed at decreasing the vulnerabilities and increasing the capacities of WHRDs .

4.1 Repressive Actors

WHRDs are surrounded by several repressive actors who all share one common interest - stopping a WHRD from carrying out her work. Why they want this may differ. Community leaders or members may object to to her 'unwomanly' behaviour or the fact that she is 'meddling' in private affairs by supporting a victim of domestic abuse. Alleged perpetrators from

a case a WHRD is working on may want her to back down and drop the case. In Nepal, repressive actors can be multiple, as a perpetrator can engage political party members, thugs or armed group members to threaten a WHRD. A WHRD's neighbours, her in-laws and even her own husband can all also play repressive roles. So, whilst the most obvious source of threat is often the alleged perpetrator, WHRDs can face multiple threats from a variety of sources at any one time.

If a WHRD continues with her work despite receiving serious threats and intimidations the next step taken by the repressive actor is often to threaten her family. Once other family members see their own safety at risk, even if they had been previously supportive, they often turn against the WHRD. In many cases, the WHRD's family feels a sense of duty to prevent her from carrying out work if it challenges the social order. If the source of repression comes from within her own family, the WHRD is extremely vulnerable to abuse in which the community rarely intervenes.

4.2 Threats and Abuses

At its core, work to defend human rights threatens to change power relations. As a result, all HRDs are at varying levels of risk of receiving the

threats and abuses from those who have strong interests in maintaining status quo. All human rights defenders therefore face the risk of threats and abuses designed to silence them. These could range from threatening phone calls to slander and physical attack.

Beyond these 'typical' threats and abuses that all HRDs face, WHRDs in particular also face gender-specific threats. The latter are threats or abuses which relate to the fact that the defender is a woman, or are made possible because of the position of woman within society. Such abuse could be threats to rape, threats to have the woman thrown out from her house, actual rape or other forms of sexual abuse.

Whether typical or gender-specific, both types of threats and abuses can have gendered consequences – the social, or other, consequences that occur after the threat or abuse is made as a result of the position of women within society and the perception of what her abuse means in a wider sense. In Dhanusha, WHRDs are often confronted with intimidations and harassment, and occasionally physical abuse. Like their male colleagues they receive death threats as well as threats of physical abuse. In relation to 'typical' threats and abuses, WHRDs in Dhanusha are more vulnerable and less protected, because violence towards women is common and widely accepted.

The act of gathering a mob, surrounding a WHRD's house and shouting threats appears to be a common tactic to intimidate WHRDs in rural Dhanusha. In the following case, the mob wanted to prevent the WHRD from attempting to file a case with the police.

One evening in 2010, the house of a young Dalit WHRD was surrounded by a group of fourteen people. The WHRD was able to identify some of them - most were local men affiliated to different political parties, and one was her own brother-in-law. He shouted out to her *"If you go to the police we will throw a bomb into your house"*. A villager affiliated to a political party also screamed, *"We will put a cloth into your mouth and beat you."*³⁸

There are also incidences in which a WHRD herself is cornered and surrounded by several people threatening to beat or rape her. At times it

³⁸ Meeting with a WHRD working in a rural area of Dhanusha district, Dhanusha District, March 2011

remains a verbal attack, but it can result in a WHRD being pushed around or beaten.

“When I was working in Siraha district [the neighbouring district to Dhanusha] I campaigned to raise awareness about a witchcraft case where the accused woman had been forcibly fed faeces. I went on a fact-finding mission with another WHRD to the village where the incident had occurred. In the middle of the market place 50-60 local people surrounded me and were on the verge of beating me, when I was rescued by a group of HRDs. After that incident I also received a threatening phone call.”³⁹

Dhanusha's WHRDs also receive gender-specific threats. In part this is related to their challenge to the social order through their work. They are commonly accused in public of damaging social norms and values. WHRDs often also receive threats aimed at the security of their families, such as threats to abduct their children. Sometimes the repressive actor exploits the weak social status of the woman by threatening that she will be banned from the village if she continues to work on human rights issues. More severe gender-specific abuses include cases of rape and cases where WHRDs have been forced to leave either their marital or maternal homes.

The gendered consequences of threat and abuse in Dhanusha are manifold and not always easily identified. A WHRD who has suffered threats or physical abuse will often find that her community apports blame to her, for 'bringing it upon herself' by going beyond what is expected of her as a woman. Consequences of slander may mean that the woman in question is treated as being of low moral standing. This can affect the way her family and neighbours treat her. Family members may also pressure the woman to stay at home and give up her work. A woman who has been slandered or sexually abused may be unable to marry or her husband may file for divorce, as has happened on numerous occasions in Dhanusha.

Despite receiving threats and severe intimidations many WHRDs continue with their effort to bring justice to victims and make perpetrators accountable for the human rights violations they have committed.

³⁹ Meeting with a WHRD, Dhanusha District, June 2011

4.3 Capacity of Perpetrators to Act on a Threat

All the repressive actors mentioned have some capacity to act on their threats, since violence against women is widely perceived as acceptable. Reluctance on the part of the police to follow up on incidents of domestic abuse leaves this avenue open to potential repressive actors. All potential perpetrators of violence against WHRDs are likely to be emboldened by Nepal's pervasive culture of impunity. As one WHRD explained:

*"I get threats from party cadres and members of my community. They threaten to shoot me. But the police cooperate with them, not with me."*⁴⁰

As there are various repressive actors (some of whom hold influential positions and status within the community) who oppose the work carried out by WHRDs, this vulnerable group is at risk of systematic isolation. Potential supporters in the village may choose not to interfere with the affairs of WHRDs due to fear for their own safety. To mitigate the process of systematic isolation, WHRDs have developed different protection strategies.

4.4 Protection Strategies of WHRDs

Sticking together: To protect themselves, WHRDs sometimes only go out of the house in groups of three to five.

Communication: WHRDs stay in close contact with each other and share information regarding their respective work. Threats or intimidations will be communicated to other WHRDs in the village.

Solidarity: If a WHRD receives serious threats, other defenders from the same village speak with the perpetrator on her behalf, seeking to deter the continued use of threats.

Support networks: A high amount of WHRDs are connected to the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), which provides shelter in cases where a WHRD is at high risk. This and other links are in turn useful connections with the wider network of human rights defenders, as NGOs can do advocacy work on behalf of WHRDs and use their

⁴⁰ Meeting with a WHRD from a rural community, Dhanusha District, January 2011

connections to the international community in Nepal, such as UN agencies, embassy officials and international human rights organisations.

4.5 Capacities and Vulnerabilities of WHRDs

To create a secure environment for the defenders it is important for them to be aware of and understand their own vulnerabilities and capacities in order to maintain and strengthen capacities and to decrease identified weaknesses. The following capacities and vulnerabilities were identified by around 60 WHRDs in Dhanusha who participated in the consultation.

Capacities:

- In cases of domestic violence, WHRDs are able to provide first aid for the victim and also moral support and counselling in the long-term.
- WHRDs are aware of the need to create as secure an environment as possible for themselves before being able to help others with their cases.
- Having a support network of WHRDs is an asset that WHRDs make use of at the local and district levels.
- National and international advocacy links through WOREC and PBI.

Vulnerabilities:

- Lack of knowledge about the justice system in Nepal and about international human rights norms.
- Lack of knowledge about personal security.
- Poor relationship with authorities, especially the police.
- Weak or non-existent direct links to national and international organizations providing legal support.
- High potential for WHRDs to become victims of gender-based violence themselves.
- Lack of credibility - no public recognition that they are human rights defenders.
- Lack of basic office facilities due to limited financial means.

5. Protection Gaps and What can be Done

That WHRDs rely on each other for support in their work seems only normal. That this is often the only support they have is of real concern to PBI and other colleagues. This section will sum up the support that WHRDs have and identify gaps, looking at what can be done to decrease vulnerabilities.

At both local and district level in Dhanusha, a WHRD network, coordinated by WOREC, appears strong and functioning. This network allows a WHRD in a village to call on the physical and advocacy support of other WHRDs in the area, as well as a national organization, as WOREC. WOREC, in turn, has links to international organisations working on human rights and women's rights in particular, which are able to make overtures to the Government of Nepal on behalf of a WHRD.⁴¹ WOREC is also a member of the European Union Working Group on HRDs in Nepal, which sits quarterly in Kathmandu to discuss ways of improving support to HRDs and WHRDs. An extraordinary meeting of this group to discuss an urgent case can be called at any time.

Whilst access to these networks can be facilitated through WOREC, during the consultations WHRDs expressed they feel they do not have sufficient access to information about this sort of advocacy support. They were unaware of the international protection mechanisms that exist, namely the UN Declaration on HRDs and the EU Guidelines on HRDs.

Many of the consulted WHRDs are illiterate and/or speak languages other than Nepali, and recognized that this may have made it harder for them to access information on such protection mechanisms. There was a general feeling that knowing about these entities would increase the WHRDs' sense of how to access protection support from the international community. At the very least, they would be able to ask WOREC to raise concerns on their behalf. More immediately, however, WHRDs expressed the desire to learn more about the human rights conventions and declarations, so that they could feel confident within themselves for their work and with their advocacy. They believe this can also give them further credibility within their own communities.

⁴¹ WOREC has links with organisations such as Frontline, Forum Asia and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders.

The stark protection gaps for WHRDs in Dhanusha and across Nepal exist at both the district and village levels. Here the daily negotiations of human rights work and suppression of the same play out, often long before details of an incident can make it to Kathmandu and be turned into an advocacy briefing. As we have seen in the section above, in the absence of support from families, communities, police or political representatives, WHRDs rely heavily on each other in facing the obstacles and challenges they meet whilst carrying out their work. This goes a long way in providing support. But, as the vulnerabilities section shows, the overwhelming lack of credibility given to WHRDs, along with the dangers all WHRDs face, as women defenders in a conservative patriarchal social context, means that in the current context WHRDs require more support than what their fellow WHRDs alone can provide.

Other potential sources of support in-country and gaps include:

National Protection Mechanism

The main protection gap for WHRDs in Nepal is the lack of a national protection mechanism for HRDs. The Nepali state has the responsibility, namely through its police force, to protect HRDs and WHRDs. Currently this obligation is through the fact that HRDs and WHRDs are citizens of Nepal. Legislation that relates this obligation specifically to the protection of these citizens as HRDs and WHRDs should be much stronger. Civil society and the international community have been pushing for this. There have been some successes, but more lobbying is required.

- In 2009 the Supreme Court ruled that WHRDs should be provided with gender-sensitive protection mechanisms by the government of Nepal.⁴² This has yet to be implemented.
- During Nepal's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process at the UN Human Rights Council in January and June 2011, the Government of Nepal rejected two strong recommendations to better support HRDs. This was a blow for HRDs in Nepal, but there are two glimmers of hope for a lobbying angle:

⁴² WOREC, *Declaration of the National Consultation of Women Human Rights Defenders with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders*, November, 2010
Available at: <http://www.worecnepal.org/event/seminar/declaration-national-consultation-women-human-rights-defenders-united-nations-special->

1. The Government of Nepal accepted a recommendation made by the Czech Republic to 'Take concrete steps to ensure the security of human rights defenders'.⁴³

2. In its justification for rejecting two further strong recommendations, the Government of Nepal said it was 'considering adopting a special program in order to ensure further protection of human rights defenders'.⁴⁴

What would such a national 'protection mechanism' look like?

Such a mechanism would include a number of components. These could be: legislation that necessitates swift police investigation and prosecution of abusers of HRDs and WHRDs; the establishment of safe-house systems; financial support for HRDs forced to relocate or stop work for some time; increased policing of an area or individual HRD, amongst others. What a Nepali HRD protection mechanism would look like would have to be worked out in relation to the context and in consultation with HRDs and WHRDs in the country. Any protection mechanism must be gender-sensitive, taking into account the variegated needs of women HRDs, such as separate safe-houses, childcare provisions and sensitive investigations.

EU Guidelines on HRDs

The European Union Guidelines on HRDs focus on how the European diplomatic community in any given country can improve the situation for HRDs and WHRDs through financial and political support, but also activities and events designed to raise the public profile of defenders. In Nepal the EU Working Group on HRDs is comprised of a number of

⁴³ *Nepal Universal Periodic Review*, 10th session, Geneva 2011. The report is available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/NPSession10.aspx>

⁴⁴ "The Government of Nepal is committed to the protection and promotion of human rights while maintaining peace and security in the country. Security agencies are active in ensuring security of all citizens including the rights defenders, journalists and women rights activists. The rights violators are prosecuted as per law. The Government of Nepal is considering adopting a special program in order to ensure further protection of human rights defenders." *Nepal Universal Periodic Review*, 17th session, Geneva 2011.

The report is available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/116/42/PDF/G1111642.pdf?OpenElement>

different European embassies, civil society organisations, OHCHR-Nepal and PBI.⁴⁵

- Regarding WHRDs at the grassroots level, the EU Working Group on HRDs in Nepal could look to increase the public credibility of WHRDs through interaction programs and events with actors such as police personnel and political party representatives.
- EU embassies should make financial support available to WHRDs working in villages. Efforts will have to be made to publicize these opportunities amongst women from rural communities and find ways to reach out to potential beneficiaries who are illiterate.
- Civil society and INGO members of the working group, including PBI, should be more proactive about creating a two way flow of information – sharing details of incidents happening at the grassroots level with the working group, and sharing information about the working group's existence, tasks and functioning with WHRDs at the grassroots level.

Regional Protection Mechanism

Unlike the Americas or Africa, Asia has no regional protection mechanism for human rights defenders.⁴⁶ This would require buy-in from a number of different Asian governments in order to kick-start a successful process for such. In its absence, HRDs and WHRDs are unable to appeal to a regional set of governing guidelines for HRD protection. Pan-Asia civil society advocacy goes some way to supporting Nepali HRD and WHRDs, but should not be seen as a substitute for a regional protection mechanism.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations listed below draw on all of the sections of the report and are designed to address vulnerabilities identified by WHRDs in

⁴⁵ 2004 the European Union adopted a set of guidelines on ensuring the protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) with the aim of providing EU Member States with practical guidance on protecting and supporting HRDs (available at: <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>) In Nepal, EU missions have formed the EU Working Group on HRDs (EUWG on HRDs). Guided by a local implementation strategy, the EU missions are committed to undertake activities aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of HRDs in country. For more information: <http://ukinnepal.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/pdf1/hrd-english>

⁴⁶ This is, however, debatable. For example, ASEAN adopted a human rights component to its charter just a few years ago which shows that certain groupings of Asian countries do have a recognized human rights body. However, Nepal is not a member.

order to reduce the overall threat level for WHRDs in rural Dhanusha.

These recommendations are provided with the aim to enrich the support which the international community and Nepali civil society does and can give to HRDs and WHRDs. Much of the change to be made is the responsibility of the Government of Nepal. The international community and Nepali civil society can play an encouraging role in lobbying for such change.

® **Raising the Credibility of WHRDs**

1. Create opportunities to publicly recognize and celebrate the work of WHRDs, such as creating awards ceremonies or inviting them to events.
2. Provide or facilitate the provision of training to WHRDs about:
 - International human rights
 - The justice system in Nepal
 - Personal security
 - International protection mechanisms for HRDs
3. Create opportunities for WHRDs to make contact with and voice their concerns to relevant NGOs and relevant international organisations.
4. Organise roundtables or other interactions with authorities and political parties so that WHRDs are shown to be more credible and relationships with authorities strengthened.

- ® **Encouraging Better Policing for WHRDs** (in line with the Government of Nepal's commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Security Council's Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820)⁴⁷

5. Lobby to include a session on the roles of HRDs and WHRDs and the need for gender-sensitivity when working with these groups within police training packages, which would include taking action to make them more credible, cooperation and swift investigation and prosecution of cases of abuse.

6. Through dialogue with government and police, encourage concerted implementation of Nepal's Domestic Violence and Punishment Act 2065.

7. Ask state authorities to fully cooperate with WHRDs by conducting fair, impartial and timely investigations of cases raised by WHRDs, implementing gender-appropriate security measures aimed at preventing abuses of WHRDs and, if prevention fails, swiftly investigating and prosecuting abusers of WHRDs.

- ® **Improve Legislation** (in line with the Government of Nepal's commitments to CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 and 1820)

8. Following the commitments made by the Government of Nepal during the Universal Periodic Review to 'adopt special protection mechanisms',⁴⁸ and the 2009 Supreme Court of Nepal directives on

⁴⁷ Nepal is a party to CEDAW. The full text of the convention can be found at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

Nepal has adopted a National Action Plan on Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 for the period of five years from 2011 to 2015. The full texts of the recommendations can be found at: http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf

And: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/391/44/PDF/N0839144.pdf?OpenElement>

protection mechanisms for WHRDs, support and encourage the government and police to implement gender-sensitive HRD protection mechanisms in consultation with WHRDs.

9. Monitor how the state meets its obligation to implement the recent Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Bill.

10. Under its commitments to end violence against women, including being a party to CEDAW, urge the Government of Nepal to repeal the legal provisions which limit the registration of cases of sexual violence to 35 days, and those of domestic abuse to 7 days.

® **Material/Holistic Support**

11. Make material resources for WHRDs available, including for human rights and security trainings and office equipment. Find ways to publicise these opportunities to WHRDs living in remote areas who may be illiterate or non-Nepali speakers.

12. Provide or facilitate services that would address visible yet often neglected gendered concerns for WHRDs including childcare, healthcare and psychosocial support.

⁴⁸ The report is available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/116/42/PDF/G1111642.pdf?OpenElement>

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Peace Brigades International (PBI) is an international grassroots organisation with consultative status at the United Nations. PBI has been working to promote nonviolence and protect human rights since 1981. Established in 2006, the Nepal Project works according to the philosophy of nonviolence, within the framework of international human rights norms and principles. It is independent of political and religious agendas, abides by the principle of non-interference and only works on the request of its partners.

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PBI NEPAL PROJECT

P.O. Box 8975, E.P.C. 1865

Kumaripati, Lalitpur

Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: +977-1-221 1200 (Nepal)

Fax: +977-1-500 8737 (Nepal)

Email: info@pbi-nepal.org

Web: www.pbi-nepal.org

