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Bhutan Country Conditions Report

National Partnership for Community Training

Florida Center for Survivors of Torture

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Timeline

- 1907** Ugyen Wangchuck becomes Bhutan's first hereditary ruler.
- 1910** Britain gains control over the foreign relations of Bhutan.
- 1949** Two years after India gains independence, Bhutan signs the "Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship with India" in which India promises non-interference in the internal affairs of Bhutan, but retains influence in foreign relations.
- 1952** Jigme Dorji Wangchuck becomes king. Bhutan establishes the National Assembly.
- 1958** Slavery is abolished. Bhutan enacts Nationality Laws granting citizenship to Bhutanese originally from Nepal.
- 1959** Bhutan bans immigration of Nepalese.
- 1964** Disputing political factions leads to violence and the assassination of the prime minister.
- 1971** Bhutan becomes a member of the United Nations.
- 1972** Jigme Singye Wangchuck becomes king and follows the policy of cautious modernization after his father dies.
- 1974** Foreign tourists are first allowed into Bhutan.
- 1977** The Bhutan Citizenship Act is enacted requiring applicants to have lived in the country for 20 years, to have a working knowledge of the written and spoken language, and to practice the customs and traditions of the Bhutanese. A Bhutanese woman married to a foreigner is a citizen, but her husband and children are not. A Bhutanese man married to a foreigner is considered a citizen as are his children, but the wife is not.
- 1980** The National Council for Social and Cultural Promotion is established in order to integrate Bhutan. However, in the same year, the Marriage Act is enacted discouraging inter-marriage between traditional and Nepali Bhutanese.
- 1986** The Sixth Five Year Plan hopes to preserve and promote national identity and self-reliance.
- 1988** National census used to identify illegal immigrants. Further measures are taken to strengthen Tibetan-based Bhutanese culture at the expense of the Nepali-based culture.
- 1989** Even though Nepali, Dzongkha and English had been the official languages of Bhutan, the Nepali language is no longer used in schools.
- 1990** Violent ethnic conflict and anti-government protests erupt in Southern Bhutan. Thousands of Nepalis are evicted or flee to Nepal. Those who flee are called traitors. Their family members lose citizenship and are charged with crimes against the nation. The government calls dissenters "Ngolops", translated as "terrorists" or "criminals". Bhutan People's Party is formed.
- 1992** A life sentence is given to the leader of the Bhutan People's Party. Bhutan National Democratic Party is formed.
- 1994** The Druk National Congress (DNC), which calls for democracy as well as protections and respect for human rights, is established in exile in Nepal.
- 1996** Nepal demands that Bhutan allow for the return of approximately 80,000 refugees.

- 1997** Amnesty International expresses grave concern over human rights' violations in Bhutan.
- 1998** King Wangchuck presents the "Four Pillars of Happiness"; sustainable economic development, environmental conservation, promotion of national culture and good governance. The National Assembly is given the ability to elect and replace a majority of the cabinet and to replace the king with the crown prince. The DNC claims an imprisoned activist died from torture and malnutrition.
- 1999** Amnesty International asserts that approximately 120 political prisoners received excessive prison sentences and that many were tortured and mistreated in detention. The government begins to allow restricted access to television and Internet services.
- 2001** Approximately 100,000 people living in refugee camps in Nepal are allegedly forced out due to ethnic and political repression. Bhutanese and Nepalese authorities discuss when, how, and who will be allowed to return to Bhutan.
- 2003** King Wangchuck meets with India's national security advisor to discuss the security concerns of both nations.
- 2005** Wangchuck states that he will relinquish his throne to the crown prince in 2008 after parliamentary elections.
- 2006** Preparations are made for the 2008 elections. Training of poll workers begins. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck relinquishes power to Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.
- 2007** Bhutan gains more control over foreign and defense policies after signing a new agreement with India. A mock election introduces voters to the process of parliamentary democracy. Prime Minister Khandu Wangchuck resigns to run in elections.
- 2008** Ethnic Nepalis are blamed for a series of bomb attacks. Bhutan Harmony Party wins 44 of the 47 seats in the first election. One other party wins the remaining 3 seats. Both parties are pro-monarchy. Constitution is ratified July 18, 2008.



*For research purposes please contact NPCT for references.

Torture Methods

SEVERE BEATINGS with fists, rifle butts, canes, sticks, branches, batons, chains, and belts on the head, backs, arms and soles of the feet have been done to intimidate and get information from detainees about others. Prison guards reportedly change every hour, and with the change come new beatings to someone in the prison. Prisoners are always fearful of beatings. Torture and beatings during interrogations have resulted in hospitalization and death.

FORCED FIGHTING between prisoners has occurred for the amusement of the guards.

CHEPUWA occurs when torturers stand on or press on a prisoner's legs that have been tied or clamped with bamboo.

SEXUAL HUMILIATION including anal insertion with canes, being stripped naked and forced to walk in the prison yard in front of guards and their wives with weights tied to the genitals, being stripped naked, tied, and beaten in public in the police courtyard in front of relatives and the public has been used to convince the public not to support "anti-national" groups, protests, and activities.

RAPE of women and girls by the Royal Bhutanese Army including repeated gang rape for at least a month at a time has been reported in large numbers. Women have died as a result.

STRESS POSITIONS including being tied upside down and left hanging, being bent down on fingers and toes and beaten, and sitting cross legged with hands and feet tied together.

DENIAL OF ACCESS to lawyers and relatives and arrests without formal charges leave detainees wondering if they will ever be released or see their families again.

THREATS have been made by interrogators against detainees' family and friends if "anti-national" activities do not end. This includes giving false information to detainees about the death, murder, or rape of a family member or claiming that a hole has already been dug to bury the detainee in.

FORCED MARCHING has occurred when peaceful protesters have been arrested, tied, or chained in groups, and forced to march to prison.

IRRITANT TORTURE is the application of irritants like chili powder to body parts, open cuts, or sores.

DENIAL of nutrition, sleep, health services including the inability to bathe, sleep, eat, or drink water has resulted in disease and death. Prisoners report being offered urine in place of water and given rice mixed with glass or sand.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND SENSORY DEPRIVATION include being blindfolded, hooded, and kept in dark rooms in isolation from other prisoners and guards.

HAIR TORTURE involves being dragged by the hair or having hair pulled out or burned.

COLD TORTURE is forced exposure to extreme cold.

Current Situation

GOVERNMENT: Bhutan's constitutional monarchy officially began on July 18, 2008 when parliament adopted the constitution moving Bhutan from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy. Parliament consists of a National Council of 25 seats of which 20 members are elected by each of the 20 districts and the remaining five are nominated by the monarch, and of the National Assembly of 47 seats which are elected by direct popular vote. The Supreme Court is maintained by the king and the high court is appointed by the king.

ETHNIC MAKEUP: Ngalops, Sharchops, and Lhotshampas; the Ngalops are the majority and dominant group in society and the government. Their culture, norms, and Buddhist religion are considered to be the standard that all citizens should adhere to. They are believed to have migrated from Tibet in the 8th and 9th centuries. The Sharchops are thought to be descendants of the earliest and largest group to live in Bhutan. Together with the Ngalops and other indigenous groups they are known as the Drukpas and account for 65% of the total population. The Lhotshampas are descendants of Nepal and account for 35% of the population. They are mostly farmers and speak many different Nepali dialects and mostly practice Hinduism.

REFUGEES: Near the end of the 19th century, many Nepalese began to migrate to Southern Bhutan, where they had been allowed to maintain their language and customs. However, in the mid-1980's the Bhutanese government began passing laws stripping away the citizenship rights of many Nepali-speaking Bhutanese or Lhotshampas. After government attacks on protests calling for democracy and respect for human rights, many Lhotshampas left Bhutan fearing persecution and torture from the Bhutanese government security services. Since 1990, over 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees have entered Nepal. To date, the issue is still unresolved with most refugees living in UNHCR camps. In 2007, all of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal qualified to be resettled in a third country. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), by the beginning of 2011, 34,353 of the 40,420 that had already been resettled did so in the US, while 54,709 are in the process of resettlement and 17,533 have not expressed a desire to relocate to a third country.

SUICIDE: In January 2011, IOM looked into unconfirmed reports of increasing suicide rates among Bhutanese refugees who had already been resettled or were still living in camps. IOM's three week assessment concluded that the suicide rates among Bhutanese refugees being resettled in the US and elsewhere and those in the camps are significantly higher than the rates of suicide reported among the general population in the US, in the world, and in the districts where the refugees had lived.