

# **Peace Initiatives in Dolakha and Ramechhap Districts: A Rapid Assessment**

*By*

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## PREFACE

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The people's war, launched by the CPN-Maoist nine years ago, has escalated violence in Nepal to a dangerous level. The political forces could not foresee that the insurgency, started from the mid-west hills, would spread to such a threatening height. The Maoists now claim that over 80 per cent of the territory of the country is under their control. Though this figure could be disputed by many, the presence of the State has undoubtedly shrunk significantly, especially in rural areas. The insurgency is still going through a destructive phase. Already, around ten thousand people have lost their lives, tens of thousands have been displaced from their homes, thousands have been physically wounded and many more are leaving their homes in hordes, as they could not bear the pressure from either the Maoists or the security forces, or both. A large number of physical infrastructures have been damaged and destroyed and development activities have come to a halt. Every day, several heart-rending news and incidents concerning the violence emanating from the conflict and skirmishes between security forces and the rebels are heard and seen.

As people are caught in the conflict, they are also trying to find their way out of this in their own ways—locally, regionally and nationally. News reports continue to be dominated by events ranging from peace rallies, public appeals for the release of those kidnapped by the security forces

or the Maoists to alleged atrocities and excesses committed by armed groups of both sides. This indicates strong desire of the people to resolve the armed conflict. The civil society could play a very crucial role in conflict transformation and peace building. People living in the shadow of conflict could be the best actors to transform conflict into peace. Locally organized civil society could play a major role in implementing peace negotiations at the grass roots and work as a watchdog for maintaining durable peace, even after the peace negotiation is agreed upon at the national level. Considering the importance of civil society in conflict transformation, this study aims to address questions such as what kinds of activities are being carried out in different districts and regions, what kinds of effects these activities have exerted on society and how different groups in society perceive these activities.

In this context, this study tries to document the conflict scenario at local level, the impact of the conflict on daily lives of the local people and perceptions of the local people such as women, dalits, indigenous nationalities, senior citizens and conflict victims on the conflict. The objective of this study is to convey the sufferings and perceptions of the local people on the conflict and their suggestions for its resolution to the central leadership of the warring parties, mediators and facilitators as well as international community.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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CARP	Conflict Action Research Programme
CDO	Chief District Officer
CCEEPAD	Centre for Community Environment Education and Public Awareness Development
CPN-M	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxists-Leninists
DAO	District Administration Office
DDC	District Development Committee
DEO	District Education Officer
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police
ECARDS	Ecology, Culture, Agriculture Research and Development Society
FFP	Friends for Peace
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
HURADEC	Human Rights Awareness and Development Centre
INSEC	Informal Sector Services Centre
NEA	Nepal Electricity Authority
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NNTC	Nepal National Teachers Council
SDC	Swiss Development Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	Village Development Committee
YOPECA	Youth Peace Campaign

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Since the day the ‘people’s war’ was launched by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M), ie February 13, 1996, the common people have constantly been living in fear and terror, having lost their human rights due to the killings, violence and destruction of development infrastructure by the rebels as well as due to the counter-violence indulged in by the State. The local people have become almost helpless before the effects of the conflict inflicted by both the warring sides. Unable to bear the effects of the conflict any longer, the people have gradually started organizing pressure activities with the help of the civil society. In this context, Friends for Peace (FFP) has taken the initiative to study the activities undertaken by the civil society at local level in different districts affected by the Maoist conflict for the establishment of peace.

Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) registered with the Dolakha District Administration Office (DAO) have been implementing programmes with establishment of peace as their primary objective. Amongst such organizations, the Human Rights Awareness and Development Centre (HURADEC) specifically focuses its activities on establishment of peace. Similarly, the Civil Society, Human Rights and Peace Society, Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Human Rights and Social Justice Forum, NGO Federation, Nepal Bar Association, Consumers’ Forum, Nepal National Teachers’ Organization, Nepal Teachers’ Association, Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal, Dolakha

Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Paramedics’ Association, Pest Campaign, Nepal University Teachers’ Association, Natural Disaster Management Society, Press Chautari, District Savings and Credit Cooperative Society, regional committee of the Federation of the Handicapped-Bhimeswor and Forum for Protection of Human Rights have jointly organized peace rallies. The Youth Peace Campaign (YOPECA), registered with the DAO in 2004 with the objectives of working for protecting human rights and mediating in conflict resolution, has also organized a peace rally. Organizations such as the Women Empowerment and Youth Self-employment Centre, National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)-Dolakha, the Dolakha branch of the Nepal Red Cross Society, Nepal Manav Dharma Sewa Samiti, Om Shanti, the 11<sup>th</sup> branch of the Reiyukai Nepal, Rural Development Tuki Association and ECARDS-Dolakha have also carried out a few activities for the establishment of peace. The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxists-Leninists (CPN-UML)-Dolakha has, under its ‘People’s Campaign for Peace’ programme, taken out peace marches in the areas of almost all village development committees (VDCs) in the district.

In a series of activities related to the peace process, conducted in Ramechhap district, the Madan-Asrit Memorial House, Manthali, has published a book, entitled *Impact of People’s war in Ramechhap*. The book describes with data the incidents and human casualties from the day the insurgency was

launched to mid-August 2003. The NGO Federation conducted a two-day training programme, 'Conflict Management and Social Transformation', on December 19-21, 2003, which was participated in by eighteen persons from fourteen organizations. In addition, the federation has organized peace rallies. At the public discussion programmes organized by the DAO at the end of every Nepali month, the civil society has been raising its voice for minimizing casualties of the war.

In the course of sharing local perceptions on the conflict and peace, the inhabitants of Dolakha and Ramechhap districts offered the following suggestions for stopping the violence and counter-violence engendered by the insurgency and for restoring peace.

**Suggestions for the Maoists:** (1) In view of the insurgency not bearing fruits even after nine years of war, join peace talks. (2) Lay down arms. (3) Eschew violence and extend support for development work. (4) Realize that the people want peace. (5) Join the national political mainstream. (6) Join an all-party government, conduct elections and accept people's verdict. (7) Give up the style of meting out public retribution based on one-sided analysis. (8) Do not kill those who hold dissenting views. (9) Review your own shortcomings and weaknesses. (10) Practise what you preach.

**Suggestions for the State:** (1) Stop killing and violence. (2) Accept the Maoist problem as a

political problem. (3) Do not conduct yourself as rebels and instead act in a responsible manner by desisting from counter-violence. (4) Stop misusing security apparatuses. (5) The king himself should try to bring the Maoists to the negotiation table and restore peace by embracing all pro-Constitution forces. (6) If any of the issues raised by the Maoists has people's support, take a proactive step by taking decision in its favour. (7) Go for roundtable conference and constituent assembly with the inclusion of parliamentary parties and Maoists. (8) As corruption is one of the instigating factors of conflict, act against the corrupt and design a mechanism that allows no scope for corruption. (9) Provide basic services for all people and provide equal access and opportunities for all communities and classes of people.

**Suggestions for the Civil Society:** (1) Pressurize the Maoist rebels to lay down arms and the State to stop its excesses. (2) As the civil society, being unarmed, is not heard, enhance the effectiveness of its voice.

The study has come to the conclusion that local people are of the view that, for ending the armed conflict and restoring peace, the parties to the conflict should not make victory or defeat their chief agenda, but should restore peace as soon as possible through talks for the sake of upholding citizens' right to live with freedom. The efforts of the civil society for bringing peace between the warring parties are not adequate at present.