**07KATHMANDU620**

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| **Reference ID** | **Created** | **Released** | **Classification** | **Origin** |
| 07KATHMANDU620 | 2007-03-23 11:16 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY | EmbassyKathmandu |

VZCZCXRO3636 PP RUEHCI DE RUEHKT #0620/01 0821116 ZNR UUUUU ZZH P 231116Z MAR 07 FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5380 INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5166 RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1052 RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 5843 RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5544 RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 3859 RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1213 RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0371 RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0271 RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3300 RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1574 RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2535

 UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 000620 SIPDIS SIPDIS SENSITIVE E.O. 12958: N/A TAGS: PREF PREL PGOV BT EU [SAARC](http://www.bhutan-research.org/tag/SAARC_0.html) NP SUBJECT: UPDATE ON BHUTANESE REFUGEES; MEETING WITH EU DELEGATION Summary ------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par1) 1. (SBU) At the Kathmandu-based Core Group meeting March 22, the Ambassador detailed his earlier discussions with Prime Minister Koirala, Home Minister Sitaula and Foreign Minister Oli on resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. UNHCR Resident Representative Abraham expressed concern about the activities of militant groups in the refugee camps. He indicated that UNHCR would finish the census in mid- to late-April and hoped to begin distribution of refugee ID cards shortly thereafter. UN High Commissioner Guterres may visit Nepal May 22-23. WFP Country Director Ragan reported that Swiss and Dutch contributions had secured the food supply to the refugees through June. Abraham later reported to RefCoord that Foreign Minister Oli had told him March 22 that the meeting with the Bhutanese at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit would resolve this issue "once and for all." According to an EU Parliamentary delegation, Bhutan's Prime Minister had welcomed the U.S. resettlement offer. Bhutanese officials also had indicated that Bhutan did not intend to repatriate any refugees from Nepal. Update on Progress With Nepal and Bhutan ---------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par2) 2. (SBU) At a meeting March 22 of the Kathmandu-based Core Group, Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade asked the Ambassador to provide an update on U.S. progress toward developing a resettlement program. The Ambassador detailed his meetings with the Prime Minister March 10 and with Home Minister Sitaula and Foreign Minister Oli on February 26, including Prime Minister Koirala's renewal of his decision to allow third-country resettlement. Oli, he noted, wanted to hold one more meeting with his Bhutanese counterpart, likely on the margins of the SAARC Summit April 3-4, before proceeding with resettlement. Lade, who had spoken that morning with the Danish Deputy Chief of Mission in Kathmandu, reported that the Danish mission in Thimpu intended to deliver the joint Core Group demarche to the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) on March 26. The Ambassador agreed to help arrange a joint Core Group meeting in mid-April with the Home and Foreign Ministers to discuss resettlement procedures. Lade planned to invite Core Group members not present in Kathmandu (the Dutch, Canadian and New Zealand Embassies) during his visit to New Delhi March 26-29. UNHCR Concerned About Camp Security ----------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par3) 3. (SBU) UNHCR Resident Representative Abraham Abraham said he planned to meet with Foreign Minister Oli that afternoon to urge the Government of Nepal (GON) to provide adequate security in the refugee camps. Abraham expressed concern that radical groups, such as the Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB), were becoming increasingly violent toward refugees supporting resettlement. He said that CPB members attacked five refugees in Beldangi II camp March 21. UNHCR had identified some 10 refugee youth who may have connections with the CPB. He planned to meet with the youth at the UNHCR sub-office in Jhapa District to discourage further violence. Census Update, UNHCR Guterres To Visit -------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par4) 4. (SBU) Abraham reported that UNHCR and the GON had begun the census in Timai camp and after finishing there would move directly to the final camp, Khudunabari. He expected to finish the census in mid- to late-April and would share the final results with donors by mid-May. Abraham was interested in initiating distribution of refugee ID cards immediately following the census. He could not provide a time estimate KATHMANDU 00000620 002 OF 003 for completion because the GON had not agreed upon a format for the ID card. High Commissioner Antonio Guterres planned to visit Nepal, including the refugee camps, on May 22-23, Abraham said, adding that Guterres would also visit Bhutan during his trip. Protection Update ----------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par5) 5. (U) Abraham stated that the situation in Sanischare camp, following the clash February 22 between local villagers and refugees, had improved since the Jhapa Chief District Officer (CDO) had established a committee to investigate the incident. The Deputy CDO, Deputy Superintendent of Police, UNHCR Sub-Office Director, Sanischare Camp Secretary, the local forest user group committee chairperson, and an attorney sat on the committee. Abraham confirmed that the local Nepalese community was allowing refugee students to attend school outside the camp, but otherwise movement in and out of the camp remained restricted. The local community continued to demand that Sanischare camp be moved to another location. Abraham suggested that, as a result, perhaps Sanischare camp should be the first camp to participate in the resettlement program. World Food Program Update ------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par6) 6. (U) World Food Program (WFP) Country Director Richard Ragan reported that WFP had reduced lentil distribution to the Bhutanese refugees by 1/3 (from 60 grams to 40 grams per person per day) due to supply problems. He anticipated the reduction would last roughly 4-6 weeks until the next shipment was received. Ragan indicated that Switzerland (USD 410,000) and the Netherlands (USD 617,000) had earmarked contributions to WFP that secured the food supply to the refugees through June. Norwegian Ambassador Tore Toreng suggested that Norway might have funds for the food program available in October or November. Abraham expressed concern that the European Union, a large contributor to the food program in the past, had decided to reduce its contributions by 25 percent this year. UNHCR Abraham's Meeting with Foreign Minister --------------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par7) 7. (SBU) Abraham told RefCoord March 23 that, in his meeting March 22, Foreign Minister Oli had confirmed the GON intended to discuss the refugees with the RGOB on the margins of the SAARC Summit in New Delhi April 3-4. Oli had hoped this would resolve the issue "once and for all." According to Abraham, Oli said that Nepal would only agree to a sixteenth round of negotiations if Bhutan agreed to immediately start repatriation of eligible refugees. Abraham also requested the GON approve exit permits for the 36 Bhutanese vulnerable individuals who had been accepted for third-country resettlement. (Note: Home Ministry Deputy Coordinator for Refugee Affairs Shankar Koirala told RefCoord March 22 that he had forwarded the 36 cases to the sub-office in Jhapa for processing. He anticipated the sub-office would approve these cases within two weeks, after which he would send the cases to the Foreign Ministry for travel documents. End Note.) EU Parliament Members Visit Bhutan ---------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par8) 8. (SBU) The Ambassador met separately March 22 with a five-member delegation from the European Parliament who had just arrived from Thimpu. The head of delegation, Neena Gill, reported that Bhutanese Prime Minister Khandu Wangchuk had claimed that progress on the refugees had stalled because the GON had kept changing the goalposts. Bhutan was unhappy KATHMANDU 00000620 003 OF 003 that the GON was defining the issue as one between Bhutan and the refugees, not involving Nepal. The RGOB, she said, was not willing to restart bilateral negotiations afresh. The RGOB had welcomed the U.S. resettlement offer, Gill added. Bhutan Not Willing to Repatriate Refugees ----------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par9) 9. (SBU) The Ambassador described to the European MPs Prime Minister Koirala's agreement to proceed with a large-scale resettlement program and the issuance February 13 of the U.S. "Request for Proposals." He indicated that the next step was to formulate resettlement procedures at the working level with the Home and Foreign Ministries. The Ambassador pointed out that he had seen no indications that the RGOB intended to allow any repatriation to occur. Perhaps that was because if the RGOB were to permit refugees to return to their homes in Bhutan, that could be seen as an admission of guilt for having ethnically cleansed nearly one-sixth of Bhutan's population in the early 1990s. Separately, the EU Parliament Foreign Policy advisor Xavier Nuttin told RefCoord that the RGOB had made it clear to the delegation that it did not intend to repatriate any refugees from Nepal. Comment ------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu620#par10) 10. (SBU) From the EU delegates report from Thimpu, it appears that the RGOB has not changed its position on repatriation of the refugees. We do not expect any progress on this issue at the SAARC Summit in New Delhi next month. If, however, the talks make it possible for the Government of Nepal, and the Foreign Ministry specifically, to move ahead with planning for a resettlement program, we will consider the meeting a success. MORIARTY