

**Aarati Chapagai,**

Columbus, Ohio

Hello and Namaste. My name is Aarati Chapagai. I'm a student at The Ohio State University and a proud member of the Bhutanese-Nepali community. Since moving to Columbus, I've had the chance to really reflect on and explore the experiences of my community—both those of us who've resettled and those who are still left behind.

I'm here today in strong support of Senate Resolution 69, which urges the federal government to acknowledge the human rights violations committed by Bhutan and take action to support the people still impacted by those injustices—especially the Bhutanese refugees who remain in camps in Nepal.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around 6,300 Bhutanese refugees are still living in two camps in eastern Nepal. These are people who have spent decades in limbo. They're not just facing economic hardship—they're dealing with the effects of being stateless, voiceless, and forgotten. Many lack access to even the most basic resources: healthcare, education, or the right to work. UNHCR ended resettlement efforts in 2020, and no major humanitarian agencies are helping them today. And while Nepal hasn't offered them citizenship, Bhutan continues to refuse to take them back.

According to the U.S. Department of State's Human Rights Report, about one-third of these refugees want to return to Bhutan. The rest want to either resettle abroad or assimilate into Nepal. But because of political gridlock and a lack of support from both Nepal and Bhutan, none of those pathways are realistically available. It's heartbreaking—and frankly, unacceptable.

Most of the people who remain in the camps are elderly. Many were left behind when their families resettled abroad, including here in the United States. The U.S. now has the largest Bhutanese refugee population in the world, with over 97,000 people. I'm one of them. I came here when I was eight years old, after being born in a refugee camp. My family made it out—but I know many who didn't.

Since arriving in the U.S., I've had the chance to pursue a path grounded in public service and mental health research. Through that work, I've seen firsthand how trauma—especially the trauma of displacement—doesn't just disappear when people are resettled. For Bhutanese refugees in the U.S., we're seeing high rates of PTSD, depression, and suicide. It's not hard to imagine how much more severe those effects might be for people still trapped in the camps with no support and no future in sight.

The people left behind don't have a platform to speak from. Many are too old, too isolated, or too tired to keep fighting. But their dignity matters. Their lives matter. And they deserve to be seen and supported. As Ohioans—and as members of a nation that has already welcomed so many from this community—we have a responsibility to not turn our backs on those still waiting for justice.

Senate Resolution 69 is a step in the right direction. It's a call to acknowledge what happened, to advocate for real solutions—whether that's resettlement, repatriation, or the right to integrate—and to make sure that these refugees are no longer forgotten.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this resolution. Let's show the world that Ohio stands for justice, dignity, and compassion—for every community, no matter how far from home they might be.

Thank you for listening and for your consideration.