

Testimony for Kashi Adhikari / Lamitare

Columbus, Ohio

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

Bhutan and India enjoy a warm and longstanding diplomatic relationship. India remains Bhutan's major donor, and many observers believe that Bhutan's foreign policy is significantly influenced by India.

In Bhutan, the southern region has long faced discrimination. The government's 1988 census required ethnic Nepali-speaking Bhutanese—like my family—to prove our origins, often under unfair and biased conditions. This process led to mass statelessness and forced expulsion.

My uncle, Devi Bhakta Lamitare, was an early political activist with the Bhutan State Congress in the 1950s. He faced threats of imprisonment and ultimately fled Bhutan. He lived in exile in India for the rest of his life and passed away in 2022, never having been able to reunite with his family.

Government officials frequently visited our home in Chirang district, harassed us, and interrogated our family members for hours. In 1991, Bhutanese army personnel raided our home looking for my father, Shiva Adhikari. Although he was ill and bedridden, they dragged him outside, took him to a military barrack, and tortured him for five days. The only questions they asked were related to his supposed support for democracy and his relation to my uncle.

He was eventually released, but only after signing a "voluntary migration" form under duress. Our family was given 15 days to leave our homeland. That is how we ended up in a refugee camp in Nepal, where we lived for two decades.

We were among the lucky ones who found a new beginning through the U.S. third-country resettlement program. We are forever grateful to the U.S. government and the American people for their generosity and compassion.

Today, I am here to urge you to pass this resolution. We seek the U.S. government's support to establish a peaceful dialogue with Bhutan—one that will help reunite families, allow the repatriation of over 6,000 Bhutanese refugees still in Nepal, and secure the release of political prisoners who have been unjustly detained for over 30 years.

Because of my family's political history, I continue to be civically engaged here in the U.S. I even ran for the House of Representatives in 2022. While in Bhutan we were persecuted and could not use our family name "Lamitare"—a name that simply refers to people from the plains. But in America, we live without fear.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. Let justice and peace finally be restored for the Bhutanese people.