

**Good afternoon, Honorable Chair Senator Johnson, Senator Reynolds and Members of the Committee:**

Good afternoon,

My name is Mani Kumar Biswa. Never in my life did I imagine that one day I'd be standing in such an important office, where every voice matters, and truth is heard. Thank you for this opportunity.

I come from a large family with four brothers and three sisters. We were living happily in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan... until my childhood turned into a nightmare I've never been able to forget.

I still remember the day my mother stood silently, looking at our home, our fields, the animals we raised... including my favorite dog. I had never seen her cry like that before. I was 14. Curious, I asked her why she was crying so much. She took a deep breath and said, "There is no hope that we will return." I didn't believe her. But that final glimpse of our house from the hill, and the suffering that followed, became the biggest nightmare of my life.

That was the day we left our country—never to return.

It was April 1992. I remember being excited to ride a bus for the first time, but I didn't know it would take me across the border to a foreign land called Nepal into a refugee camp. Life in a refugee camp is not something anyone wants to remember, but we lived there for over 17 years. We still talk about those days, and many who hear our stories find them hard to believe. But for us, it was just reality.

Every day in the camp was a new battle between life and death. But I never gave up. I finished high school in the camp, still dreaming of returning to Bhutan one day to serve my country. We lived on hope.

My mother used to tell us a story: during a terrible famine, a farmer lit a fire and placed some stone beneath the ashes. He gave his children sticks and said, "Keep stirring; when it cooks, you can eat." Days passed, and it never cooked, but the children survived on hope. Eventually, the father returned with real food and saved them.

That story kept us going.

But our hope of returning to Bhutan never came true.

Even so, I kept moving forward. I served as a schoolteacher in the camp, motivating refugee children to dream bigger.

Eventually, we gave up on going back and accepted third-country resettlement. In August 2008, I arrived in the United States with my wife and two sons. Coming straight from a refugee camp to

a country like America wasn't easy. But I worked hard and used every resource I could find to build a better future for my children.

My first job was as an interpreter for newly arrived refugees. I kept learning and growing. In 2017, I became the first Bhutanese Licensed Community Health Worker in Boston, MA. Over the years, I've worked as a case manager, serving vulnerable populations from all walks of life.

Later, I moved to Columbus and began working with the Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio (BCCO) in January 2020. We didn't know then that a global pandemic was about to hit. Under the leadership of Director Sudarshan Pyakurel, we formed a volunteer team to distribute groceries, hand sanitizers, gloves, masks, Tylenol, baby formula, and more. We educated families using information from the CDC and health professionals.

I was on the front lines delivering these supplies—but due to my weakened immune system, I ended up hospitalized with COVID. At one point, I truly thought, this is it. My mind went back to Bhutan. To my refugee years. My oldest brother and his family are still stuck in Bhutan. To my 75-year-old mother, who still dreams of seeing Bhutan before she dies.

I survived the pandemic. And I've kept serving.

Today, I am a proud father. My eldest son will graduate next year from Miami University with a degree in Computer Science. Yet my heart aches, because my mother hasn't seen her eldest son in over 35 years.

Last year, my nephew, my brother's son in Bhutan passed away. We couldn't even attend the funeral. All we could do was video call and cry. That's the price we pay when our humanity is denied and borders are built on injustice.

I hope this resolution, SR-69, brings hope. Not just to my mother, but to every Bhutanese family with a story like mine. I hope it sparks the conversation, the recognition, and the justice we have waited for all these years.

Thank you for listening to my story. Thank you for your time.