

National *Harwa-Charwa* Rights Forum submits a demand letter for Freedom

The representatives of the National *Harwa-Charwa* Rights Forum (NHCRF) submitted a five-point demand letter to the Hon. Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture, and Cooperatives of Province no 2, Mr. Sailendra Prasad Sah on 16 February 2019 in Janakpur, Dhanusha. Mr. Lagendra Sada, secretary of NHCRF handed over the demand letter insisting the provincial government to declare the freedom of *Harwa-Charwa* from all forms of bonded practice and exemption from all forms of debt taken by the *Harwa-Charwa* families.



Figure 1 Mr. Lagendra Sada, secretary of the NHCRF submitting the demand letter to Hon. Minister Sailendra Prasad Sah

Harwa-Charwa is an extreme form of bonded labor. Although the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has officially abolished this system,

Harwa-Charwa still prevails as a pure form of bondage labor in some districts of province no 2. The constitution safeguards an individual's fundamental right of living a dignified life free from any form of bondage, trafficking, and slavery. In this context, the members of NHCRF requested the provincial government to develop province no 2 as a *Harwa-Charwa* free province.

Hon. Minister Sailendra Sah committed to support the *Harwa-Charwa* movement for their freedom. He suggested, to organize a joint interaction between the ministry, and other organizations that are working in the movement for developing a clear outline to resolve the issue of *Harwa-Charwa* community. Further, he emphasized on the need of collecting authentic data for designing a long-term sustainable rehabilitation programme for the *Harwa-Charwa* community. "Based on these data, additional plans of classification, distribution and identification cards, employment programmes, and other services can be provided to these families", the minister added.

In addition to that, Hon. Sailendra Shah shared "Although, the demand of land for housing and agricultural purpose has been made, without the proper data of land this demand cannot be fulfilled. The provincial government is willing to ensure the registration of unregistered land for the family members of *Harwa-Charwa*. But, the province government will discuss on the issues raised by *Harwa-Charwa* community after the government pass the bill on Land and Guthi Act in province no-2. This meeting is the first step to address the issues of *Harwa-Charwa* community." He added that "Interactions and discussion programmes in presence of stakeholders needs to be

regularly organized to bolster this movement. I am committed to develop a guideline to proceed the freedom and rehabilitation of the Harwa-Charwa community. All of our cumulative efforts will only yield fruitful results. "

Furthermore, the programme advisor of The Freedom Fund for Nepal, Mr. Balamram Bhattarai committed to provide technical support in the data collection campaign initiated by the provincial government. Despite few, all the families of the *Harwa-Charwa* communities are compelled to live under the poverty line, that too in an extreme form of bonded labor. The significant step to improve the living standard of these communities is the declaration of freedom by the provincial government, Bhattarai added.

Likewise, Darshan Mandal, the chairperson of NHCRF shed light on the horrendous suffering of the people living as *Harwa-Charwa*. Manda shared *"from time immemorial, our families are living a life of a Harwa-Charwa. None of us own a single piece of land. We are living in unregistered land and, the banks of the river. These vulnerable settlements are also in constant threat of eviction by the local government. To our distress, the life of our upcoming generations has also been overshadowed by the landlord's debt. The provincial government is in power, and the NHCRF requests this government to declare the freedom of the Harwa-Charwa community and execute effectively rehabilitation programmes."* Similarly, Kalpana Karki, the campaign manager for Community self-reliance Centre (CSRC) committed to provide technical support to the provincial government for developing people-centered land governance policies such as Housing rights bill, and Land Act to design an effective land management model of the province.

The programme was organized in presence of 14 (including 3 female) participants representing National and District level Harwa-Charwa rights forum, National Land Rights Forum, and implementing partners of Dhanusha district (i.e. Dalit Society Welfare Committee, and Community Improvement Centre).



Delegation programme in a glance.

Annex:

Demands of the National *Harwa-Charwa* Rights Forum:

- Declare the freedom of *Harwa-Charwa* from all kind of bonded practices, and exempt all forms of debt taken by the *Harwa-Charwa* families.
- Collect the data of *Harwa-Charwa*, and distribute the identification card accordingly in the local level by the end of the fiscal year 2075/76 (i.e. September 2019).
- Provide 0.17 hectares of land to the *Harwa-Charwa* families for the purpose of farming and settlement on the basis of identification card.
- Provide free education to children of *Harwa-Charwa* families up to higher secondary level.
- Ensure one family, one employment policy and establish a special reservation quota for *Harwa-Charwa* families within the Dalit reservation quota.