

## Supplemental notes on the Core Democratic Values and Nepal

These core democratic values are being heavily debated in Nepal right now as the interim government tries to draw up a new constitution that is inclusive to all ethnic and caste groups and protects the rights of its citizenry.

With each value you will find ways in which the new Nepali government is working to, or is meeting each of the values. You will also find ways in which Nepal is facing hardships or challenges in meeting the value, the pros and cons. Each bullet does not necessarily represent a slide in the power point presentation, but they do correlate and the values listed here are in the same order as in the power point. I recommend reading through this once while going through the power point before presenting to your class.

The first seven slides of the presentation are a general overview of Nepal, and then the presentation moves to the core democratic values.

After each slide/value, it may be beneficial to ask students how our society compares with Nepal's society in terms of the value being assessed. It is also worth noting as you draw these comparisons that Nepal is a developing nation; our country went through this same process many years ago. That is not to say, we didn't have hiccups along the way, be sure and ask as you go through the presentation what challenges we faced in our history regarding the values. Try and draw as many comparisons as possible.

- Life: Life is highly valued in Nepali society, even the life of animals.
  - Many animals are considered to be sacred, among them the cow and monkey hold special rank as sacred animals. They are given free reign around cities and the countryside equally.
  - Buddhists also hold life to be dear and therefore the taking of any life is forbidden, even the life of something as miniscule as a mosquito or fly.
  - Hindrances to everyone having equal access to sustaining their lives come in a few different forms
    - Water: This is the first main issue with everyone's ability to the right to live. Clean drinking water is not readily available for large portions of the population; this is true in both the rural setting and the urban setting. (stat on infant death rate b/c of diarrhea)
      - In cities people often have to wait hours for before their turn to fill their water receptacle.
      - In the country side the upper castes often own the fertile land in the river valleys and lower castes live higher up on the valley walls. Collecting water there presents a special challenge, a challenge that is the woman's responsibility. They have to haul water from the valley bottom to their homes, this can often take hours and they are often carrying a load that is between 50 and 60 pounds.
    - Food: The Terai (or southern plains) is the breadbasket of the nation. The mid-hills have a great variance on precipitation and

weather patterns, so it is very common for one region to be experiencing a drought while a neighboring region is in the midst of a bumper season. This is a great challenge to the new government as they unite the nation as well as subdivide it, much like we have subdivided our nation into states. The question is how do you make one region share their resources with a neighboring region?

- Liberty: Nepali citizens enjoy all types of liberty to different extents.
  - Personal Freedom: Traditionally the caste system directed what your profession was, who you could marry, and what social networks you could be involved with. The influence of the caste system has been diminishing with time. One of the main goals of the interim government is to involve the lower castes in the government which traditionally was dominated by the ruling castes, the Brahmin and Chettri, therefore a quota system has been started in the interim government allotting 13% of the Constitutional Assembly seats to the Untouchable castes.
  - Political Freedom: Nepal since its unification in the 1850s has been a monarchy. This ruling class has often been unstable and unable to meet the needs of the people. A variety of different systems have been tried, democracy among them, and have failed.
    - The first time Nepal played with democracy was in the 1960s, when King Mahendra allowed parliamentary elections to be held. After a brief year of conflicts between the palace, the elected government, and the Prime Minister, the King dissolved Parliament and banned political parties which started the Panchayat System. This political system censored the people and did not allow them to participate in the political arena and banned all political parties.
    - The Panchayat System was overthrown in 1991 and democratic elections were once again held. “The palace did not really orchestrate wholesale repression of the movement, although it had the military capacity to do so. The king refrained from unrestrained use of force mainly because the international climate was not conducive to the crushing of democratic movements. And it was especially unfavorable for a regime that was heavily dependent upon the good will of aid donor nations.” (Chadda, 114)
    - From 1996-2006 Nepal struggled with an internal battle, the Maoists against the Nepali Army. The Maoists were attempting to overthrow the ruling classes and redistribute the wealth of the nation; therefore this movement was very popular among the unemployed and poor. This insurgency cost the lives of 14,000 people. In the end, a peace agreement was signed and the Maoists realized their political clout and joined the political process.
    - Nepal is currently trying to reorganize the government and rewrite a new constitution. The Constitutional Assembly has members

- from most caste groups as well as a quota for the number of women involved in writing the constitution. This new constitution seeks to be inclusive to all ethnic and caste groups of Nepal.
- Economic Freedom: Nepal has a strong agricultural sector, but the majority of crops are consumed domestically and not exported. It also has abundant cottage industries but being a land locked nation presents many challenges to exporting these goods. The fledgling government also lacks adequate revenues to sponsor large public works; therefore most of these come from foreign donations and investment. The largest donor nations are China, India, USA, and Japan.
    - Nepal is also dependent on aid from foreign nations for large infrastructure projects. This money is often pinched away as it makes its way through the bureaucracy involved in these types of projects, leaving insufficient funds for the project itself.
    - Some different types of projects are hydroelectric dams for generating electricity, sewage and water lines to provide clean drinking water to the population, health camps in the country side where doctors and hospitals are all but non existent.
    - One large sector of the economy comes from remittances (money sent back into the country from Nepali citizens working and living abroad.) This makes up 40% of the GDP.
    - Another growing sector of the economy comes from tourism. The Maoist insurgency hurt this sector for ten years, but it is rebounding and should continue to grow substantially as long as Nepal remains stable.
      - Two large tourist draws that Nepal enjoys are trekking through the Himalayan Mountains, and visiting religious (Buddhist and Hindu) sites.
  - Pursuit of Happiness: Nepal has a growing education system and education is seen as the most lucrative way of advancing oneself in Nepali society
    - The private education sector is very strong and is producing well educated individuals.
    - The public schooling system is not as strong and provides a very basic education up to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for the poor.
    - This is a great improvement considering the fact that in the 1960s there was only one school reserved for the royal family, and now there are over 30,000 although class ratios are about 40 students to 1 teacher.
  - Common Good: This is a value that is incredibly abundant in Nepali society. Their family structures are very strong, along with the sense of community.
    - During rice planting and harvest time, it is common for community members to work together, helping to spread this work out.
    - Ruling class and wealthy need to invest in the infrastructure of Nepal and provide economic opportunities and education for lower castes.

- **Justice:** This value is still struggling greatly in Nepal. Historically, the government could do as it wanted without repercussion. The new government is trying to reconcile with this fact and become more transparent to its population.
  - There are still many cases of crime that go unpunished, this is especially true of white collared crime or governmental repression.
  - A common response to this lack of justice is a Bhandha, which is a form of civil disobedience where people organize and block all forms of transportation from using the roads. This has a crippling effect on the economy and day to day business of the country and hopefully will force the interim government to take this value more seriously. Sadly though, this form of disobedience is also often misused as groups try and force the government to meet their needs no matter how ludicrous they seem.
  
- **Diversity:** Nepal is an incredible diverse nation both ethnically and religiously.
  - There are many indigenous groups that still live in their traditional ways. There are also many cultures that have migrated to Nepal in different points in history. In total there are 103 official caste and ethnic groups, many of these groups have their own customs and even speak their own language. This is possibly the greatest challenge facing the interim government as they try and appease all of these groups with the new constitution.
  - Hinduism is the prominent religion of Nepal with about 80% of the population practicing some form of Hinduism. Buddhism makes up about 10% of the population. Christianity and Islam are welcomed and practiced in Nepal but at a fractional proportion.
  
- **Equality:** Having spoken of the incredible diversity of Nepal above, it is of no surprise that finding equality for all these groups is a great challenge to Nepal. The caste system, although it is weakening, still has a strong hold on the opportunities presented to commoners. If you were born into a lower caste, you simply wouldn't have the same opportunities as someone born to the Brahmin or Chettri caste at this point in time, maybe in the future this will change though.
  - The role of men and women are clearly defined within traditional Nepali society. These roles are changing, especially as girls attend school and gain an education.
    - Traditionally women were the caretakers of the home. As cooks, they eat last, only after all men in the family have eaten, this often leads to insufficient nutrition for the women. Women are also the water gatherers, as discussed earlier, depending on where you live, this can take a few hours every day.
  
- **Popular Sovereignty:** The new Constitutional Assembly is composed of 601 members of which 240 come from direct elections by the population and 335 come from proposal election and 26 seats are saved for special appointment.
  - The 335 seats that come from proposal elections are used to fill certain quotas to make sure all groups are involved in writing this new

constitution. 13% of seats held by Untouchable Castes. 33% are held by females. 20% come from the southern Terai region. 4% come from remote regions of Nepal.

- One reason the Panchayat system was started in the 60s was because of high illiteracy rates. At that time, only about 1% of the population was literate. If you can't read, how can you make wise political decisions? So the King began encouraging and supporting education. Nepal's literacy rate today is 80%.
- Patriotism: The Nepali people are very proud of their country and their cultures. Throughout their history, they have succeeded in being the only South Asian country to never be taken over by an outside country.
  - After the bloody Maoist insurgency, peace building is at the core of this new constitution. They want a government which is truly representative to the people and they want to accomplish this peacefully.
  - One of the largest problems facing Nepal is called "Brain Drain." This term refers to people who leave their home country to seek more lucrative employment opportunities abroad. Finding ways to retain these educated individuals by improving the economic sector of the country is a great challenge facing Nepal.

#### Conclusion and Overall significance of Nepal

- Nepal is centered at the hub of humanity, surrounded by 2/5s of the world population.
- They are a small,