

THE  
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**Cover Note for Public Release of Carter Center Nepal Private Reports**

October 2014

From 2009-2014, The Carter Center conducted a mission to report on Nepal's peace process and constitution drafting. Teams of national and international long-term observers were deployed in each of the country's five development regions. Over the course of the mission, the observations they produced were shared with the Nepali public and international stakeholders in a series of reports.

On a small number of occasions, the mission developed reports that were shared on a more targeted basis. These reports contained timely information about unfolding events that, because of limitations in the breadth or quality of data, combined with the potentially volatile nature of the subject matter at the time of their drafting, may not have been appropriate for general release. Many of the findings in these private reports were incorporated, with greater detail and better contextualization, into later public documents.<sup>1</sup>

The Carter Center is now pleased to make these previously private documents available to the public. The reports are:

1. *Carter Center Observations on Discharged PLA Combatants*. July 23, 2010. In early 2010, Carter Center observers sought to interview former People's Liberation Army (PLA) combatants who had been discharged from the cantonments because they had joined the PLA as minors or after the signing of the May 25, 2006 Ceasefire Code of Conduct. The report summarizes findings from interviews with 20 discharged PLA and the close family members of two more. In addition, individual interview summaries are provided in an annex. As described on page two of the report, there are several important limitations to the data, most notably that nearly all interviews were conducted with PLA who had returned to their home villages. Therefore, the report may not reflect the experiences of PLA who did not return home or who enrolled in UN-sponsored vocational training following their discharge.
2. *Carter Center Observations on Recent Identity-Based Mobilization in Nepal*. June 8, 2012. As the May 27, 2012 deadline for promulgation of a new constitution approached, Nepal saw its most widespread identity-based political mobilizations in years. In many areas of the country there were extensive rallies, prolonged general strikes, and extended protest programs intended to pressure negotiators in Kathmandu, in particular over the role of identity in a future federal structure. In some regions, geographic overlap of competing protest programs led to tensions and clashes, as well as fears that disagreement over issues of identity would lead to wider communal rifts and potential violence. The report summarizes observer findings on these protests and highlights some notable dynamics. In addition, for this public release,

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, a November 2009 report on Local Peace Committees that was shared privately with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction and its international partners was made public in May 2011. It is available at: <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/nepal-051011.html>.

an annex is included of five situation reports that convey findings submitted by observer teams during the rapidly unfolding events of May 16 to May 29. These situation reports were shared privately with Carter Center contacts and contain information that was not possible to fully vet given the fluidity of events and the logistical difficulties caused by extended strikes.

The Center hopes these reports, which contain extensive observations on district and village-level events, will assist interested scholars and analysts in documenting and understanding Nepal's political transition. In addition, in May 2014, The Carter Center transferred all of the field observation data produced by Carter Center observers to Social Science Baha, an independent Nepali research institute. This information is housed in a searchable database and is available to the public.<sup>2</sup>

For more information on the Center's political reporting project in Nepal, please see *Political Transition Monitoring in Nepal, 2009-14: Final Report*.<sup>3</sup> All Carter Center peace and constitutional reporting from Nepal is available at: [http://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/democracy\\_publications/nepal-peace-reports.html](http://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/democracy_publications/nepal-peace-reports.html).

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/nepal-091014.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/nepal-2014-final.pdf](http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/nepal-2014-final.pdf).



## **Carter Center observations on recent identity-based mobilization in Nepal**

June 8, 2012

### **Introduction**

As the May 27, 2012 constitution drafting deadline approached, Nepal witnessed its most intense identity-based mobilizations in several years. National-level announcements by political leaders on proposed models for state restructuring were met with rallies, prolonged general strikes, and other protest programs organized at the national and local levels. In some regions, geographic overlap of programs among competing groups led to tensions and clashes. Further, because the main agendas of most of these programs were to either promote or oppose different kinds of federalism, and because activists' views on federalism tended to break down along ethnic lines, there was fear of more widespread communal divisions and violence. The Far-Western Tarai, parts of the Western Tarai, and Kaski saw particularly severe tensions develop rapidly.

Following the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, most protest programs were cancelled and previously tense situations calmed. However, local interlocutors note that dynamics underlying the protests remain and that unrest and violence could resume when a decision on federalism comes closer. Further, and although fears of widespread communal violence were not borne out, in some areas interlocutors express concern that recent events may have caused lasting damage to inter-communal relations and worry about what future political developments may bring.

To assess the significance of recent events and identify steps to reduce future tensions, The Carter Center is currently working on an in-depth public report on identity politics in Nepal. The report will be based on data gathered by Long-Term Observers over the last year and in the context of the Center's previous observations in Nepal since 2007. It will be distributed in English and Nepali to a wide range of stakeholders, including the media, at the national and local levels.

In advance of this planned public report, the Center is discussing its observations and concerns with national stakeholders in Kathmandu. However, recognizing a desire by the international community to engage on these issues promptly, we also wanted to share privately a brief, written snapshot of some observations and trends that have emerged out of local-level developments over the last several weeks. The Center hopes they will be useful reference points for ongoing discussions of federalism and communal issues in Nepal. Comments and feedback on this private, informal discussion paper are welcome and will help inform the content of the longer identity politics paper that is currently being drafted.

### **Observation Findings from Recent Protest Programs**

#### **1. Identity-based mobilization to date tends to be strongest when it is in reaction to an external "trigger."**

Identity-based groups have been conducting activities throughout the constitution drafting process. Most of these activities, including protest programs and strikes, have been largely peaceful, and have not

garnered much national-level attention. However, identity-based activism has spiked at moments when there has been an external trigger to react to – generally a trigger in which a decision is made, or appears imminent, that could produce perceived (or actual) winners and losers. Such triggers can be national or local, but tend to produce a larger response when they are nationally generated.

Thus, although identity-based groups were largely quiet for most of early 2012, there was a spike in activity in reaction to the release of the State Restructuring Commission (SRC) report on January 31. Additionally, as the May 27, 2012 deadline approached, it became increasingly clear that for the first time ever in the constitutional process there might be a draft or full constitution produced. This was unlike previous constitutional deadlines which had met with minimal local-level response as there was no “product” or decision to react to. The May 2012 deadline, therefore, provoked massive protests throughout the country, in particular by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) and other Adivasi-Janajati organizations through the Indigenous Nationalities Joint Struggle Committee (INJSC) and also by the newly formed National Integrity and Ethnic Goodwill Joint Struggle Committee (NIEG) an alliance of 11 different groups including the Brahmin Samaj and Chhetri Samaj. Carter Center observers reported a sense among identity activists in some areas of a “now or never” mindset – that the CA deadline represented a last chance to realize their ambitions, whether in favor of or against ethnicity-based federalism. With the dissolution of the CA, identity-based groups currently appear to be quiet again but may be strategizing about the best way to take their agenda forward and the next triggers that could be used for mobilization.

Finally, external triggers have also encouraged identity-based groups to overcome the internal factionalism that has weakened their advocacy efforts over the past several years. For example, the Tharu movement has been plagued by internal divisions but unified rapidly across several districts in the lead up to the May 27 deadline and in response to large-scale United Far West protests.

## **2. Identity-based mobilization can escalate rapidly, even in areas that may seem unexpected.**

Carter Center observers in both the Western Region and the Far Western Region noted that they were surprised by how quickly and how strongly identity-based mobilization occurred in certain parts of their regions. This was not necessarily a reflection of strong citizen opinions on state restructuring prior to mobilization. For example, in Kaski district previous observation indicated that many citizens were not particularly interested in federalism, or were unaware of it entirely, and did not have strong opinions on state restructuring. Nonetheless, both Janajati and Brahmin/Chhetri groups mobilized very quickly in Pokhara in the lead-up to the May 27 deadline, bringing large numbers of people on the streets. A similar dynamic was observed in Nawalparasi, where on a previous Carter Center observation visit many Brahmins said they were not aware of the Brahmin Samaj’s presence in the district, yet clashes between Tharu activists and Brahmin activists escalated rapidly.

In some cases, rapid mobilization was facilitated through the use of previously existing structures. For example, in Tharu areas, the network of traditional *barghar* leaders was reportedly used to mobilize citizens to participate in rallies and protests (Carter Center observers are currently working to confirm how extensively and effectively this network was actually used). For their part, United Far West activists tapped into pre-existing political party networks to identify and mobilize supporters to join their protest programs.

Finally, Carter Center observers also heard some reports that citizens were offered financial incentives to attend protest programs or were coerced to attend programs by threat of financial sanction. A Pun Magar interviewee at a program in Pokhara noted that anyone who did not participate had to pay a fee, while those who did participate did not have to pay. Another interviewee said that participants in a rally

organized by Brahmin and Chhetri groups were asked for NPR 500, while those who did not participate were expected to contribute NPR 1000.

**3. A common trend in many parts of the country was a polarization between Janajati groups on one side and Brahmin/Chhetri or “regional unity” groups on the other.**

Across most development regions, including the Eastern, Western, and Far Western Regions, Carter Center observers reported increased polarization between Janajati organizations and Brahmin/Chhetri organizations. This polarization sometimes led to the formation of alliances on either side against the other. For example, in the Eastern Region, NEFIN forged an alliance with Federal Limbuwan State Council-Lingden faction (FLSC-Lingden) and Janajati leaders of political parties, and played a prominent role in coordinating a joint Janajati front. The competition between this front and Brahmin/Chhetri groups was openly acknowledged to Carter Center observers. A NEFIN representative told observers, “We are trying to make our bandh stronger than the Brahmin/Chhetri bandh.”

This division could also be understood as a polarization between groups advocating in favor of ethnicity-based federalism and those advocating against. Even though different groups in favor of ethnic federalism may disagree amongst themselves about the boundaries of planned new federal states, they were able to unite in opposition to those that opposed ethnic federalism altogether.

This polarization was not a specifically local phenomenon but was reflected nationwide as Janajati activists in one part of the country demonstrated solidarity with those elsewhere. For example, Carter Center observers heard slogans like, “Death to Undivided Far West” in the Eastern Region.

**4. Certain dynamics in the May 2012 protests emerged as “conflict risks/triggers,” including but not limited to:**

- Attempts to defy bandhs. In multiple locations, including Kanchanpur and Jhapa, attempts to deny bandhs escalated into tensions and in some cases clashes. As bandhs dragged on in some regions (particularly the Far West), concerns of increased likelihood of clashes between bandh organizers and citizens defying the bandh were commonly raised.
- Police action. While often police intervention was successful in calming situations, it also was a factor frequently correlated with clashes. For example, in otherwise calm Nepalgunj, police and demonstrators clashed when authorities stopped a United Mid-West rally due to a lack of permit. In Nawalparasi, police intervened to stop bandh enforcement, which led to a clash with Tharus. In Kailali, police and Tharu cadres clashed inside a hospital, resulting in injuries to Tharu leaders and increased tensions, as Tharu protestors perceived the force used to be excessive and unprovoked. In Pokhara, police also clashed with bandh organizers.
- Opposing protest programs taking place in the same physical place. As with the Gaur killings in 2007, when two opposing groups organize protest programs in the same place there is a high likelihood of tensions and increased potential for clashes. For example, Tharu and United Far West movement protestors clashed on May 11 for this reason. While initially the administration in the Far West attempted to keep groups separate, they were not able to maintain this throughout the month-long period of overlapping protests and bandhs.
- Tit for tat dynamic. Frequently, when one protesting group has taken an aggressive action against the other at a period of already high tensions, it has provoked an escalated negative response. For example, in Nawalparasi, Tharus allegedly vandalized a bus carrying Brahmin/Chhetri activists

traveling without a sign during the Tharu bandh, and in response Brahmin/Chhetri activists burned a local Tharu museum.

- Public symbols representing identity-based groups or positions. In several areas, identity-based group signboards (such as signs saying “Welcome to United Western Region” or “Welcome to Tamuwan State”), office buildings, symbols, and other locations, as well as attempts to erect new symbols or signboards, became sites of aggressive actions. In Pokhara, there were several examples of tensions and clashes over signboards erected in the area. In Kailali, the offices of a prominent Tharu-led NGO were attacked, while a Tharu museum was burned in Nawalparasi.
- Rumors and misinformation. Rumors, sometimes inflammatory, can spread quickly during times of tension. For example, at a demonstration in Pokhara it was reported that a baby had been killed after being hit by a stone during a demonstration. This turned out to be false but was widely believed by the crowd at the time and increased tensions locally.
- Inability to control cadres. Some identity-based groups are relatively newly formed, often do not have a clear hierarchal structure, and lack leaders able to effectively control cadres. This was cited by numerous interviewees as a concern as the May protest programs escalated.

**5. Fears of communal tension were high in all regions in the lead-up to the May 27 deadline, and in some cases highly inflammatory and provocative language was used by protestors. The depth of communal sentiment in the aftermath of these protest programs is currently unclear.**

Throughout most of The Carter Center’s observation work in Nepal, observers have reported that identity-based mobilization has largely targeted the government and national-level politics rather than other communities or other local organizations. However, as protest programs increased in the lead-up to May 27, this shifted in some districts (although not all). For example, in Pokhara multiple civil society interviewees noted the tensions were the worst they had ever seen in the area, and that the dynamic had shifted from targeting the state to mobilizing sentiment against different communities. In the Far-Western Tarai, some government contacts noted they were very worried about violence and even “civil war” and were not sure how to control recent developments.

There were serious concerns about inflammatory language in some areas. Again in Pokhara, there was aggressive and provocative language used by different groups against each other, such as “cast out all the flat noses.” And in the Far West a prominent Tharu activist said at an event, “We can bomb these seven buildings as symbols of the seven Far Western hill districts and you will have nothing.”

By contrast, observers have also noted some evidence of identity-based groups trying to emphasize open and inclusive language. For example, Limbuwan factions in particular have evolved in a more moderate direction since their formation. They also seem to have had relative success in communicating that non-Limbus are welcome and would be treated equally in a Limbu state, although observers nevertheless recently noted increasing polarization between Brahmin/Chhetri organizations and Janajati activists in formerly calm Ilam district. Also, in some regions strong and successful efforts by civil society, local administration, parties, and activists helped prevent communal tensions from increasing, such as in Banke and Bardiya districts. The same Tharu activist quoted above reportedly also made efforts to prevent clashes at moments of particular tension.

The depth of communal sentiment following the May 2012 protest programs is unclear at present. Previous Carter Center observation on communal tensions over the last few years has indicated that, in general, fears of future communal tensions due to the federalism debate had been high, but actual

incidents of communal tension had been relatively low and mainly arising from issues unrelated to federalism, such as disputes over cultural practices such as untouchability. One of the most common responses from citizens when asked about state restructuring was that they do not want any new structure that will lead to communal tensions or problems with their neighbors. Despite several years of attempts by identity-based activities to mobilize people along identity lines, there has been relatively little response from common citizens in many parts of Nepal.

In this context, Carter Center observers reported that tensions during the May protest programs were generally lower outside of municipalities and off of the main highways, even in mixed communities. More follow-up research is currently being done by observers to assess how communal sentiment has changed in the post-May context.

**6. Observers reported negative perceptions by Janajatis regarding the role of police and media, as well as civil society sponsored “goodwill rallies.”**

In a number of districts across the country, Carter Center observers heard allegations that the police and/or media were biased against Janajatis. This is not a new perception; it has been reported previously to observers. Examples given included a perception that police were “protecting” a signboard in favor of a United Western Region in Kaski. Another example was a reported police “attack” on Tharu activists in Kailali district. Additionally, in several districts, ethnic activists complained that media were not reporting on “Janajati issues” or were emphasizing negative aspects of pro-ethnic federalism protests.

At the same time, media representatives were seemingly targeted during some bandhs, including the NEFIN bandh in Kathmandu. Journalists in Chitwan and Makwanpur reported feeling more fearful during the NEFIN bandh than during previous protest programs. In Nawalparasi and Rupandehi problems between the media and bandh enforcers were reported. In Jhapa, bandh enforcers reportedly vandalized media vehicles.

Finally, there was a widespread perception that civil society sponsored “goodwill rallies” which took place around the country were in practice “anti-ethnic federalism” rallies, and that the calls for goodwill were more directed at ethnic activists than at Brahmin/Chhetri activists. This dynamic is also not new, and was reported previously to observers at a “Pokhara Peace and Goodwill Rally” in May 2010.

**7. Carter Center observers continue to note conflicts between official political party positions and the positions of local party members – notably those from parties’ ethnic sister wings – on state restructuring in various areas across the country. These splits are sometimes reflected in an inability of national political leaders to consistently control their cadres at the local level.**

This split has been most evident over the longest period of time in the Far Western Region, particularly in the hill districts, where representatives of all parties (including the Maoist party) have told Carter Center observers since 2009 that they are in favor of a United Far West, even though it is not their party policy. In the Far Western Tarai, some members of political parties supported the United Far West protest programs, while Tharu members of the same parties took to the streets to support a Tharu province. Local party-affiliated cadres of the United Far West movement also refused to call off their protest programs until their demands were fulfilled in writing, despite requests from central-level leaders who also supported their agenda; local leaders cited mistrust of national-level politicians and said that oral promises and appeals were insufficient.

Other splits have been observed in the Eastern Region, where Limbu sister wings of the NC and UML have reportedly become frustrated with their parties and told observers they felt stronger affinity with the

NEFIN position than their party position. In Ilam the NEFIN bandh was reportedly supported by ethnic sister wings of the NC, UML, and UCPN(M).

**8. It appears that in advance of the May 27 deadline, tensions were highest in “contested” geographic areas where multiple identity groups were strong enough to launch competing claims.**

For example, both Kailali and Kaski districts were areas that were strongly contested by different identity groups (in Kailali, the United Far Western Struggle Committee vs. the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee, and in Kaski, an alliance of Janajati groups vs. the Brahmin and Chhetri Samajs). By contrast, although Limbu areas in the Eastern Region have seen high levels of identity-based organization and activity by Limbuwan groups, these areas were relatively quiet in the lead-up to May 27. Some interlocutors suggested the calm was because of the confidence of Limbuwan groups in their strength, and the relative absence of equally strong groups that could challenge their position.

**9. Different protesting groups drew on different methods of organizing.**

For example, in the Far Western Region there was a clear contrast between Tharu protest structures and United Far West protest structures. The Tharu movement, with its longer history of activism and protest, was more “leader driven,” meaning that it had a hierarchal structure and was organized under well-recognized Tharu leaders such as Laxman Tharu and Dili Chaudhary. By contrast, the relatively nascent United Far West movement was seemingly more “citizen driven” with relatively few recognized leaders and a less organized support base, and relied on citizen sentiment against ethnic federalism and informal support from other organizations rather than on an existing organizational base or well-coordinated umbrella grouping. In Kanchanpur, for example, political parties were late to catch on to the UFW movement and only joined on the fifth day, though individual party members were involved from the beginning. This meant that it was difficult for government officials and political leaders to figure out who among the UFW protesters to negotiate with, and also that supporters were less well controlled due to the lack of clear leadership. There is some indication that UFW emerging leaders have been able to gain support from certain groups of citizen following their activism.

**10. Some positive local initiatives to calm tensions took place as protest programs escalated, though in some districts civil society representatives were perceived as favoring one side or another according to their individual ethnic identities and were thus not considered able to serve as neutral brokers.**

CDOs in districts such as Ilam, Kaski, and Chitwan called protesting groups together to negotiate “open periods” in the bazaar, to sign codes of conduct, and to ensure that competing groups were not scheduling programs for the same time and location. In some districts such as Banke and Bardiya, the Local Peace Committee held interaction programs and attempted to prevent communal feelings from escalating. There were also some initiatives at the VDC level, such as the signing of an 8-point agreement in a Kanchanpur VDC between Pahadi and Tharu citizens. In some instances, local actors attempted to prevent clashes but were unsuccessful, such as in another part of Kanchanpur where an NGO leader (representing the Pahadi community) and a political leader (representing the Tharu community) tried to mediate. This was reported as a rare event, as it was generally noted that civil society representatives, like their counterparts in political parties and the business community, were perceived as favoring their individual ethnic identities over their organizational affiliations. Thus, they were reportedly unwilling to facilitate during identity-based conflicts due to the public perception that they were biased and fears that they could face retaliation.

## **11. In some areas, organizations emerged to demand that particular districts be selected as the new provincial capitals.**

Such demands were reportedly raised in places such as Ilam, Dhankuta, Biratnagar, Dang, Nepalgunj, Dadeldhura, and Doti, using different methods of protest and sometimes involving the local business community. As the debate on federalism moves forward and implementation begins, it can be expected that such protests could spread and potentially increase in strength.

### **Points for future consideration**

Both Nepali and international stakeholders are working to assess the significance of recent identity-based mobilizations and considering how to move forward. Some of the issues that observers will be attempting to understand better in the coming weeks are listed below and may also be of relevance for international stakeholders to consider and discuss:

#### The future of communal relations

- **How serious and widespread is the risk of future communal tensions or violence? What upcoming events may be possible “triggers”?** Despite tensions in some areas, fears of widespread communal violence did not come to pass. Why not? What were the mitigating factors? And will this be the case again in the future, or is it more likely that the situation could in fact deteriorate into significant violence? What are the lessons learned from the local level? What is the likelihood that events such as new agreements on state restructuring, future elections, publication of 2011 census data, and other issues could serve to re-trigger tensions?
- **What, if anything, could be done in the short term due to address the tensions that emerged at the local level in the lead-up to the May 27 deadline?** Now that local level protest programs have finished, it looks superficially as though the problems have gone away. However, it is likely that resentment and tensions remain in some places, especially areas that saw aggressive slogans and protests directed between communities in the lead-up to May 27.

#### New political formations: implications for national policy and local politics

- **How important are new political groupings that have emerged in recent months to push particular federal agendas?** There have been notable formal and informal efforts among Adivasi-Janajati activists nationally and locally to unify their organizations and advocacy, as well as increased cooperation among opponents of ethnic federalism. Such efforts appear likely to continue.
- **Are current political practices at the national level sufficiently inclusive to encourage broad acceptance of a new constitution?** Political leaders should consider whether dialogue around the constitution in general and state restructuring in particular is inclusive and broad enough to help build the legitimacy of future agreements and address underlying tensions between groups. The continued focus on the number, names, and boundaries of future provinces rather than on the goals of federalism and the functioning of new states may be encouraging a zero-sum mentality among activists and citizens.

#### The state, media, and civil society: overcoming perceptions of bias

- **Are allegations of police bias well-founded, and what can security forces do to rebuild trust in areas where they were perceived as biased?** Open dialogue between security forces and a wide range of stakeholders at the local level could help all sides identify ways to handle tense situations in a way that preserves a sense of mutual respect and state neutrality.
- **How did local and national media perform in covering recent protest programs?** The Federation of Nepali Journalists in Kaski convened a roundtable discussion of local media to

discuss attacks on journalists and reflect on perceptions of media bias. The discussion identified challenges that journalists face in covering political programs, reflected on shortcomings in coverage, and developed suggestions for journalists reporting on future protests. Similar discussions could be valuable in other districts, as well as in Kathmandu, to help strengthen media coverage and reduce perceptions of bias as much as is feasible.

- **How can civil society help to reduce tensions around state restructuring, in both the short and longer terms?** In some areas, the ability of civil society to play a facilitating role in managing and reducing local tensions was reduced by the perception, in some cases accurate, that civil society representatives were supporting one side or another according to their individual ethnic identities or party affiliations. Reflection and dialogue by civil society and other stakeholders in areas where this was a concern could help identify ways to strengthen the position of civil society. It could also be worthwhile to offer as models places such as Nepalgunj where civil society reportedly played a constructive role in avoiding tension.
- **How can the state, media, civil society, and political parties better inform people about federalism and federal options?** Ordinary Nepalis continue to lack of information about federalism and different options, and misperceptions about what federalism would mean in practice are common and can fuel unrest. The state, media, civil society, and parties all have a responsibility to ensure a fair and informed debate on federalism.

#### The role of the international community

- **How is the international community being perceived in the context of identity politics and state restructuring, and how concerned should the international community be about criticisms of its perceived role?** In recent weeks, Carter Center observers across Nepal have heard increased criticism of, rumors about, and allegations of bias directed toward the international community and donor-funded NGOs and INGOs. Although some of this skepticism has come from Adivasi-Janajati activists in certain regions, the most serious and widespread allegations have come from opponents of ethnic federalism, who have accused the international community and its Nepali partners of discrimination against Brahmins and Chhetris (such as in hiring practices) and of promoting identity activism through support of “ethnic” NGOs and inclusion programming.

## ANNEX

### CONSOLIDATED OBSERVER REPORTS THE CARTER CENTER MAY 16-18, 2012

*Note: This document summarizes recent field updates from Carter Center observers around Nepal. It is based on direct observations, stakeholder interviews, local media reports, and reports from other organizations. Please note that the information contained herein has not been fully vetted and therefore should not be considered verified.*

#### **Summary of Main Findings**

- The Far-Western Region has been the most active in recent weeks in terms of political protests and bandhs, and the most sensitive in terms of communal harmony. Although the indefinite Unified Far West (UFW) bandh was recently called off after approximately 20 days, a Joint Tharu Struggle Committee (JTSC) bandh continues and has been extended through May 22. The situation remains sensitive, with prominent Tharu leaders injured in recent clashes in Kailali and recent vandalism of the Tharuhat Autonomous State Council and BASE offices in Dhangadhi. Kailali and to a lesser extent Kanchanpur remain areas to watch for future tensions and clashes.
- Although the Eastern Region has been relatively quiet to date, Carter Center observers report that most interlocutors expect NEFIN and Limbuwan groups to raise their voices in the coming weeks, possibly including protest programs. There is also some concern that Janajati and Brahmin/Chhetri groups might clash in the future due to conflicting demands.
- In Kaski, interlocutors remained concerned about the possibility of clashes between different identity-based groups (in particular Gurung and Brahmin/Chhetri groups), especially if their protest programs overlap or if one group tries to challenge another's protest.
- At the initiative of CDOs in Ilam and Kaski, protesting groups in those districts reportedly agreed on codes of conduct to govern bandhs, demonstrations, rallies and other protest programs to protect communal harmony, avoid violence, and ensure continued supply of essential goods. Some party and civil society efforts to maintain harmony have also been reported in Banke.

#### **Eastern Region team report**

(TCC ER team currently reporting out of Ilam district)

##### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 18: Ilam remains relatively quiet. Bandhs called over the past week by have had little impact. The May 18 RPP-N bandh is the first bandh that has been at least partially effective.

##### *Local Initiatives*

On May 15, the Ilam CDO called a meeting with identity-based organizations and parties that had announced bandhs. The meeting also included security personnel, journalists and civil society organizations. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to avoid communal tensions and ensure continued supplies during bandhs. Reportedly all groups, including NEFIN, agreed to hold only peaceful protests, to take action against violent cadres, and to allow the bazaar to open for fixed hours.

##### *Context and Issues to Watch*

To date most groups and parties in the Eastern Region, including identity-based organizations, have focused on internal discussions rather than protests and bandhs. However, most interlocutors expect NEFIN and Limbuwan groups to raise their voices in the next weeks and perhaps organize protest programs. There is also a worry that Janajati and Brahmin/Chhetri groups might clash in the future due to conflicting demands.

Interviews in Ilam and media reports from other Eastern Region districts suggest that groups are beginning to raise demands to designate their own municipalities as the capital of a future federal province. Such demands have come up in Biratnagar, Dhankuta, and Ilam, and have often been put forward by business people. Some interlocutors were concerned that competing demands on new provincial capitals could lead to tensions.

### **Central Region team report**

(TCC CR team currently reporting out of Kathmandu)

NTR – Updates forthcoming.

### **Western Region team report**

(TCC WR team currently reporting out of Kaski district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 13: An unidentified group on motorbikes threw stones at the office of a Gurung organization and chanted anti-Gurung slogans. NEFIN informed the police but generally kept quiet about the incident, seemingly hoping to control their cadres and avoid escalation.

May 16: The National Integrity and Ethnic Goodwill Struggle Committee (NIEG) held a short march and gathering with about 300 participants at one of the main chowks in Pokhara, where they burned an effigy of Prachanda. There was no reaction from other groups and the crowd dispersed quickly once the program had finished.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 16: The CDO in Kaski called a meeting of representatives from political parties, civil society, security forces, and identity groups. During the meeting, bandh organizers from NIEG and the Indigenous Nationalities Joint Struggle Committee committed that their protests would be peaceful and disciplined. They agreed to a code of conduct (TCC has a translated copy available upon request).

May 17: The Civil Society Network for Peace (which includes FNJ, various NGOs, and the Nepal Bar Association) held a meeting in response to concerns about communal tension in Kaski. They decided to hold a "goodwill rally" and said they would invite all identity-based organizations and political parties to participate.

May 17: A new "Tamuwan Volunteers" organization was reportedly formed several days ago. They are organizing at the ward level, with the aim of raising awareness of Gurung history, identity, and the demand for a Tamuwan Autonomous State. Meanwhile, Brahmin/Chhetri Struggle Committees are reportedly also being formed at the ward and VDC level, with the aim of supporting demands made at the central level. They were previously only formed at district and municipality levels.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

Representatives of identity-based and community-based organizations consider future communal clashes a possibility, especially if protest programs overlap or if one group tries to resist or challenge another group's protest. Reportedly, no talks have taken place between Brahmins/Chhetris and other ethnic groups following previous clashes last week.

### **Mid-Western Region team report**

(TCC MWR team currently reporting out of Banke district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 18: RPP-N, the Broader Madeshi Front (BMF), Joint Tharuhat Struggle Committee (JTSC) and MJF-D all held bandhs. However, the BMF and MJF-D did not appear to enforce their bandhs in Banke. Approximately 25 unarmed RPP-N enforcers, mostly young men, were stopping motorbikes at Tribhuwan Chowk.

### *Local Initiatives*

May 17: Observers noted reports of a significant number of cross-party and cross-ethnic community meetings called with the purpose of maintaining community harmony. There have also been meetings by the press, the LPC and the human rights defenders network for the same purpose. One Madhesi party leader noted his belief that these preventative measures would be sufficient to deter clashes. However, observers are not aware of any direct meetings between pro- and anti-ethnic-federalism groups. INSEC has been asked by the LPC to act as an intermediary between the groups supporting ethnic federalism and those opposing. The CDO has issued an ordinance that any enforcer with a stick or other weapon will be immediately arrested.

### *Context and Issues to Watch*

To date, no clear indications of communal tensions or clashes between protesting groups in Banke district.

### **Far-Western Region team report**

(TCC FWR team currently reporting out of Kailali and Banke districts)

### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 18: The five-day general strike called by the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee (JTSC) entered its fifth day. It was observed as effective in Kailali district. In Kanchanpur, the market was partially open but transportation was halted and educational institutions remained closed. The JTSC has announced that its Tarai bandh will be extended for four more days, through May 22.

Local media reports (not verified):

- May 18: A scheduled mass meeting in Kailali by Tharuhat was postponed and moved to a different location, reportedly at the request of locals in light of possibility of clashes between Tharuhat and Unified Far West cadres. A large number of Tharu cadres may attend the meeting from Kailali, Kanchanpur and Bardiya Districts.
- May 18: The JTSC has formed an 11-member panel to hold talks with the government but has issued preconditions for talks. The group has demanded action against the Chief District Officers of Kailali and Kanchanpur, among other officials, for alleged excesses against Tharu protesters. Similarly, the committee has demanded action against those who set the National Tharu Museum on fire in Nawalparasi district. It also demanded that the government release all Tharu cadres arrested during the recent demonstrations across the country and withdraw any cases against them.
- May 18: Police arrested a Tharuhat cadre who allegedly stopped an ambulance in Kailali district. Tharuhat cadres reportedly vandalized the ambulance and assaulted the patient.
- May 16: A clash was observed between supporters of a Tharu state and UFWR cadres in Dhangadhi. YCL members were reportedly involved on the Tharu side. The clash allegedly occurred after a Tharuhat supporter vandalized the District Development Committee and other buildings.

### *Local Initiatives*

May 17: Goodwill rallies by various religious organization including the Muslim Unity Society, Hindu Unity Society and other civil society organization commenced in Dhangadhi to welcome the end of the UFW bandh and to reiterate goodwill and friendship among different ethnic and religious identities.

### *Context and Issues to Watch*

The Far-Western Region has been the most active region in recent weeks in terms of political protests and bandhs, and the most sensitive in terms of communal harmony. Although the indefinite UFW bandh was recently called off after approximately 20 days, the JTSC bandh continues and has been extended for four more days. The situation remains sensitive, with prominent Tharu leaders injured in recent clashes in Kailali and recent vandalism of the Tharuhat Autonomous State Council and BASE offices in Dhangadhi. Kailali and to a lesser extent Kanchanpur remain areas to watch for future tensions and clashes.

**CONSOLIDATED OBSERVER REPORTS**  
**THE CARTER CENTER**  
**MAY 22-23, 2012**

*Note: This document summarizes recent field updates from Carter Center observers around Nepal. It is based on direct observations, stakeholder interviews, local media reports, and reports from other organizations. Please note that the information contained herein has not been fully vetted and therefore should not be considered verified.*

**Summary of Main Findings:**

- The Joint Tharu Struggle Committee has announced the extension of its Tarai bandh through May 25 and said that the bandh will now be enforced 24-hours per day. In Bardiya, bandh organizers reportedly stated that the bandh will be relaxed from 5pm to 8pm daily; it was unclear if this policy will also apply in other districts.
- The Undivided Far West Civil Movement Committee is resuming its indefinite bandh program from May 24 and says it will continue indefinitely. The resumption of the Unified Far West program and the extension of the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee bandh raise the possibility of renewed tensions between these opposed groups in the Far Western Tarai.
- Tensions in Pokhara appear to be less acute than in recent days, with no security incidents reported on May 22 and May 23. Authorities appeared to take seriously the tensions and clashes that occurred on May 21 and on May 22 the CDO convened relevant stakeholders to discuss the events. However, interlocutors were concerned about the potential for renewed tension and clashes.
- Perceptions of media and police bias towards Brahmins and Chhetris continue to persist among the Janajati community in Kaski. In Rupandehi and Nawalparasi, tensions between the media and bandh enforcers reportedly increased following attacks on press vehicles and verbal abuse of journalists. In protest of the attacks, some media outlets refused to carry news of the bandh.

**Eastern Region team report:**

(TCC ER team currently reporting out of Ilam district)

*Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 22: The NEFIN bandh was effective in Jhapa and Ilam. In Jhapa, bandh enforcers vandalized press vehicles belonging to Kantipur, Annapurna Post and Sanghiya Awaz on May 21 and restricted vehicular movement of all kinds, including motorcycles. However, they reportedly agreed to allow the market open from 7pm to 5am. Limbuwan groups actively supported the bandh. In Ilam, no incidents of violence or major tensions were reported.

May 22: There were reportedly sporadic incidents of minor clashes in Morang, Sunsari, Saptari and Siraha. In the southern parts of these districts, the bandh was enforced by the Broader Madhesi Front (BMF) and in the northern parts by NEFIN and the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee (JTSC).

May 21: Tension in Surunga, Jhapa escalated during the afternoon of May 21. The business community, Nepal Jaycees and journalists demanded that the market and movement in Surunga be allowed to open. Talks held to address the situation failed. NEFIN cadres who attempted to enter the bazaar were stopped by police and it was reported that locals were prepared to resist if NEFIN cadres tried to enforce the bandh. Reportedly, around

150 people from a nearby VDC traveled to Surunga on motorbikes to resist bandh enforcers. Security presence in Surunga Bazaar and nearby bridges was reportedly strong. Police were successful in turning away NEFIN cadres and the situation had reportedly normalized by evening.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 21: Local businesspeople, representatives from Nepal Jaycees and journalists in Surunga bazaar held a meeting with bandh enforcers in Birtamode. The meeting was organized to request that the bandh be relaxed and the market allowed to open. The meeting was inconclusive and reportedly tense. NEFIN leaders reportedly accused the locals of Surunga, the business community, and journalists of being biased toward Brahmins and Chhetris, as a recent Brahmin-Chhetri bandh was reported to be effective in the area. Limbuwan cadres were said to be present in large numbers during the meeting.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

Local interlocutors in Ilam and Jhapa fear possible tension between Brahmin-Chhetri and Adivasi-Janajati communities following resistance to the bandh by locals in Surunga, which is a predominantly Brahmin-Chhetri area. There are also concerns of broader tensions between those advocating for ethnic based federalism and those who are against it.

#### **Central Region team report:**

(TCC CR team currently reporting out of Kathmandu, but the update below is for Dhanusha District)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 21: The bandh called by the Broader Madhesi Front (BMF) was highly effective in Dhanusha district. Reportedly, 150 cadres of several Madhesi parties patrolled the market on motorbikes to enforce the bandh. No incidents of violence or clashes were reported. However, cadres of Madhesi parties were reported to have burnt effigies of Madhesi leaders belonging to Nepali Congress (NC), accusing the latter of endorsing the division of the Tarai into five provinces.

May 20: According to a journalist, a group of cadres of Madhesi parties had hurled stones at the residence of [redacted], who is a central committee member of the NC and a member of the Constituent Assembly.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 21: A host of local clubs of Janakpur released a joint press statement in which they appealed to all sides to respect freedom of speech, not to attack anybody or their house, and to be responsible in maintaining peace and order.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

Differences between Madhesi party leaders and Madhesis affiliated to the NC and UML may be growing and could be an important dynamic to observe in the coming days. Additionally, although advocates of a Mithila state appear to be taking a “wait and see” approach, the approach of Madhesi parties to this demand will also be an interesting dynamic to watch.

#### **Western Region team report:**

(TCC WR team currently reporting out of Kaski district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs and Security Incidents*

May 22: The NEFIN bandh continued to be effective in Pokhara. However, unlike on May 21, no major incidents were reported.

May 22: Journalists and media persons interviewed in Rupandehi expressed concern over violence during the NEFIN bandh. Reportedly, three press motorcycles were vandalized and journalists had been verbally abused by the bandh enforcers. In response, several broadcasters and publishers, including FNJ, refused to report about the bandh.

May 22: NEFIN reportedly called off their strike in Arghakhanchi at 1pm in consideration of the “crippling” effect it has had on daily life. FNJ reported that bandh organizers had been very flexible during the bandh and that schools had remained open. A possible explanation could be a lower interest in identity politics among the Janajati community as compared to other districts, a trend that Carter Center observers had noted during their visit to the district in November 2011. However, a NEFIN representative in Arghakhanchi also reported that they intended to hold a bandh in favor of a Magarat state bandh on May 23 and 24.

May 22: A journalist in Nawalparasi reported that the local FM radio stations withheld news bulletins for two hours in protest of an attack on a journalist by JTSC cadres. A Tharu Welfare Society representative claimed that their protests had been infiltrated by vigilantes, who were acting outside of official directives, though he stressed that overlapping bandhs have made it difficult to assign blame for security incidents. According to an INSEC representative, the JTSC aggression had “overshadowed” the NEFIN and BMF bandhs, which suggested that the Tharus may be better organized in the district than previously assumed.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 22: In response to the violent incidents that took place on May 21, the CDO in Kaski held a meeting of organizations, parties, civil society, media and police in a bid to diffuse tensions between communities and prevent further escalation. Outcomes included an agreement from the police not to “suppress” protests and not to allow opposing communities to protest during bandhs called by other communities.

May 22: FNCCI in Rupandehi have called for a “goodwill rally” on May 23.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

May 22: NEFIN and the Tamuwan Struggle Committee (an umbrella organization of pro-Tamuwan state groups) in Kaski released a statement expressing their dissatisfaction with district authorities and the police, and accused them of trying to suppress their movement. Although good coordination was observed between the APF and bandh enforcers in Pokhara, Gurung bandh enforcers reported a perception of media and police bias towards Brahmins and Chhetris.

May 22: Observers heard rumors that had been circulated among bandh enforcers that Gurungs would enforce a Madhesi bandh in the hills the next day, in return for Madhesi support of the Janajati bandh.

#### **Mid-Western Region team report:**

(TCC MWR team currently reporting out of Bardiya district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs and Security Incidents*

May 23: The JTSC bandh remained effective in Gulariya, Bardiya. On Wednesday, JTSC released a press statement stating that the Tharu bandh will be enforced 24 hours a day starting from May 23. However, in Bardiya there will reportedly be a three hour window each evening between 5pm and 8 pm during which people can move freely.

May 23: Reportedly, a group demanding an “Undivided Mid-West” has planned a rally in Nepalgunj. The group has also planned to form a regional committee and district committees in Dang and Surkhet.

May 22: The Banke Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) took out a rally on Tuesday evening protesting the beating of two journalists by the Tharuhat bandh organizers on May 21 and the perceived nationwide attack on press freedom over the previous several days. Representatives of several civil society organizations and the UML reportedly addressed the rally.

May 22: According to media reports, two reporters were assaulted in Banke. The police have reportedly arrested three Tharuhat supporters in connection to the incidents. The FNJ, numerous media organizations, and several human rights issued press releases condemning the incidents.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 23: A “broader goodwill rally” sponsored by the LPC was held in Gulariya, Bardiya. The rally passed off peacefully and was attended by approximately 70 to 80 people. A similar rally was reportedly held by the LPC in Dailekh one day prior. The LPC in Bardiya also held a public meeting on May 22 to discuss the current situation in the district. Approximately 100 people participated and the meeting was broadcast live on local FM radio. A similar event was also held by the LPC in Banke District.

May 22: Civil society representatives in Gulariya, Bardiya convened a meeting and called for schools to be allowed to open during the ongoing bandhs. A JTSC leader reportedly responded that allowing the schools to open during the bandh would weaken the Tharu struggle. Reportedly, further attempts are likely to be made in the next few days to reach an agreement to re-open the schools in Bardiya.

May 21: In Banke, the District Youth Club Network organized a bicycle rally for social goodwill and urged everyone to help maintain ethnic, religious and social harmony in the district. Youths from several VDCs participated in the rally.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

NTR

#### **Far-Western Region team report:**

(TCC FWR team currently reporting out of Kailali district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 22: The Joint Tharu Struggle Committee bandh has been extended until May 25. A press release in local newspapers announced that it would be enforced 24-hours daily.

May 22: The Undivided Far West Civil Movement Committee (UFWCMC) is resuming its indefinite bandh program from May 24 and says it will continue indefinitely and enforced region-wide. The umbrella organization’s previous 21-day strike was strongly enforced. It is unclear if the group plans to implement a full transportation strike, or allow the usual group of exceptions to continue moving in the districts.

May 23: In Krishnapur VDC, Kanchanpur, an 8-point agreement has been reached between the Tharu and Pahadi communities to halt acts of violence and confrontations between the two communities. It is unclear who mediated this agreement. However, local newspapers report that the SP and a member of the RJP were present at the signing of the agreement.

May 22: Reports of an indefinite strike in Kailali and Kanchanpur by “Residents of the Far West” with Rana Tharu support have not been substantiated.

May 22: Local newspapers report that medical are running low in Bajura DHQ and that food is becoming scarce in seven VDCs due to the ongoing bandh. The Senior Health Assistant of the District Health Office told Carter Center observers that there are medical supplies for ten days in the DHQ but that vehicles meant to deliver more supplies have not arrived. He also mentioned that food supplies in the DHQ warehouse are sufficient for 15 days.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 23: A local temple has called a goodwill rally for this afternoon in Dhangadhi.

May 21: Undivided Far West supporters and various sister wings of political held an interaction program at the FNCCI office in Dhangadi yesterday evening. The agenda was reportedly to assess the outcome of the 21-day bandh and discuss further programs if political leaders backtrack on their professed support for a unified Far-Western province.

May 21: Members of the Transportation Association in Kailali issued a press release requesting a halt to all transportation strikes.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

There are some indications that activists are taking steps to avoid tensions and clashes. Far Western Awareness Forum in Kanchanpur says that the lines of communication between leaders of both movements have improved and they are regularly in dialogue with one another regarding programs and incidents in the districts. The signing of an 8-point agreement between the Tharu and Pahadi community in Gularia, a sensitive town located on the East-West Highway in Kanchanpur, is also a positive sign. However, with the Unified Far West and Tharu movements again scheduled to enforce overlapping bandhs, the potential for confrontation will increase in the coming days.

It is unclear if a renewed Unified Far West bandh would be as effective as it was during its previous enforcement of 21 days. The main bazaar of Mahendranagar has largely been open since businesspeople confronted Tharu bandh enforcers on May 20, and a senior Maoist assessed that businesspeople were not interested in closing the market for any cause. Likewise, the Transportation Association issued a press release urging “all related parties issuing protests and bandhs” to abstain from using transportation strikes to further their demands. The effectiveness of the current JTSC bandh is being tested in some places; in Dhangadhi, some shops are already gradually extending their morning business hours until 10am, whereas a few days ago it was rare to see any shops open after 8am.

**CONSOLIDATED OBSERVER REPORTS**  
**THE CARTER CENTER**  
**MAY 19-21, 2012**

*Note: This document summarizes recent field updates from Carter Center observers around Nepal. It is based on direct observations, stakeholder interviews, local media reports, and reports from other organizations. Please note that the information contained herein has not been fully vetted and therefore should not be considered verified.*

**Summary of Main Findings:**

- Tensions between Tharu bandh organizers and Pahadi citizens appear to be increasing in Kanchanpur. Two recent clashes in the district reportedly arose from citizen opposition to the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee bandh, and there is concern that the situation could worsen in the next several days, especially if the bandh is extended beyond its current end date of May 22.
- The level of tensions in Pokhara appears to have increased significantly over recent days with several interviewees describing the situation as “intensifying” and “critical”. There were two clashes between police and Janajati organizers today, contributing to increasing perceptions among Janajatis of police bias in favor of Brahmin/Chhetri groups. In one incident, three people were reportedly injured including an 8-month-old child who was hit on the head with a stone, leading to potentially inflammatory rumors that the child had subsequently died.
- Interlocutors in Ilam were concerned about the potential for clashes between Adivasi-Janajati groups, particularly Limbuwan groups, and Brahmin-Chhetri groups. They worried that it was increasingly difficult to for organizations to control their local cadres. However, they did not believe such clashes would lead to widespread communal violence. At a NEFIN torch rally in Ilam on May 19 the atmosphere was somewhat tense; however, the rally remained peaceful. At a similar torch rally in Dharan, Sunsari district, police and demonstrators clashed and 12 people were reportedly injured.
- In Ilam, as in many other districts, the NEFIN bandh has been strongly enforced. In addition to NEFIN cadres, ethnic sister wings of the NC, UML and UCPN-M as well as FLSC-Lingden were reportedly enforcing the bandh.
- In Chitwan, local journalists characterized the NEFIN bandh as “more fearful” compared to the bandhs in the past. Protesters reportedly manhandled the FNJ district secretary and vandalized his motorcycle. Journalists were concerned about the possibility of communal tensions or clashes if the bandh organizers failed to maintain control of protesters.

**Eastern Region team report:**

(TCC ER team currently reporting out of Ilam district)

*Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 20: In Ilam district headquarters, the NEFIN bandh was highly effective. Nearly all businesses were closed. Both public and private vehicular movement, including motorbikes, was completely halted. Police estimated around 60 organizers were present in the main bazaar and NEFIN stated that around 150 college students were mobilized to assist with enforcement at Ilam chowk. Organizers did not carry batons and no incidents of violence or major tensions were reported. Bandh enforcers reportedly seized some motorbike keys

from drivers, which according to NEFIN will be returned to the owners. The bandh was reportedly supported by all NEFIN members, FDNF-affiliated FLSC (FLSC-Lingden), ethnic sister wings of the NC, UML and UCPN-M, and the Baidya faction of the UCPN-M.

May 19: In Ilam, NEFIN held a torch rally attended by around 1000 people. Police presence was strong; approximately 150 police, both regular and armed, were present. Armed police carried batons, guns or teargas guns. Police seemed tense but their behavior was observed to be appropriate. Although the program was peaceful, participants were excited and at times aggressive, shouting slogans against the unitary system, the state and the three major parties (NC, UML and UCPN-M), and even against an undivided Far-West. Participants also called for unity and common struggle of all Adivasi-Janajati groups.

May 19: Clashes were reported during a NEFIN torch rally in Dharan, Sunsari. According to a local newspaper, clashes started when police tried to stop demonstrators from gathering after a demonstrator threw stones at the police. Police fired teargas and used batons and six demonstrators as well as six police were reportedly injured. According to a news report, NEFIN representatives claimed that their movement was infiltrated by the person throwing stones to start violence and discredit their protest.

#### *Local Initiatives*

NTR

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

May 20: Various interlocutors in Ilam district repeatedly raised concerns that clashes between Adivasi-Janajati (particularly Limbuwan groups) and Brahmin-Chhetri groups may occur in the near future due to their conflicting demands and increasing frustration among some sections of those groups over what they see as the dismissal of their demands. A representative of Nepali Congress' Nepal Limbu Sangh said that "relations between these two groups are getting tense and without major incentives taken at the central level to address the issue it will be difficult to control some cadres at the local level." However, most interlocutors said that while they are concerned about clashes between some groups, they are less concerned about large-scale communal tensions that would affect people not involved in politics.

#### **Central Region team report:**

(TCC CR team currently reporting out of Kathmandu, but the update below is for Chitwan District)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 21: The bandh called by NEFIN was effective in Chitwan. Two journalists reported to observers that the situation has remained "fearful" as control of organizers over the protesters was questionable. Protesters reportedly manhandled the FNJ district secretary and vandalized his motorcycle at around 11:00 am at Ratnagar, Tandi.

#### *Local Initiatives*

The Chitwan CDO organized a meeting of all stakeholders in the district approximately one week ago to avoid any untoward incidents, as bandhs called by the Brahmin Samaj and Chhetri Samaj and Tharu organizations in the district were scheduled to overlap. All sides agreed to ensure the bandhs would go forward peacefully.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

Local journalists in Chitwan characterized the NEFIN bandh on May 21 as more fearful compared to the bandhs in the past and said journalists themselves were feeling insecure. Journalists also spoke about the possibility of communal tensions or clashes if the bandh organizers failed to maintain control of the protesters.

### **Western Region team report:**

(TCC WR team currently reporting out of Kaski district)

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs and Security Incidents*

May 21: Cadres enforcing the NEFIN bandh removed “United Western Region” signs from two intersections in Pokhara, resulting in skirmishes between Janajatis and the police at both sites. At one chowk (intersection), three people were reportedly injured, including an 8-month-old child who was hit on the head with a stone. In response to the sign being removed, around 300 Brahmins and Chhetris gathered around the chowk and wrote a new sign. A lengthy standoff followed, with around 70 APF positioning themselves between the Brahmins/Chhetris and Janajatis (mainly Gurungs from Tamu Dhi Nepal), who numbered around 30. The Brahmin/Chhetri group was much more vocal and there were several episodes of sporadic chanting. A group of women carried the new sign to the chowk and the police allowed them to erect it. After this most of the Brahmins and Chhetris dispersed. However, potentially inflammatory rumors then spread that the child who had been injured had died.

May 19: After NEFIN’s pre-bandh torch rally, around 10-15 Janajatis on motorbikes reportedly started vandalizing public and private vehicles, though the bandh had not yet started. When a policeman intervened he was physically assaulted. APF were subsequently deployed to the scene but no arrests were made. A small group of cadres, acting on their own initiative, appears to have been responsible.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 22: The Association of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists (ANIJ) organized a roundtable meeting of bandh organizers in Kaski calling for peace and ethnic harmony among them. Attendees included representatives from the Brahmin Samaaj, Chhetri Smaaj, Tamu Dhi Nepal, and other Janjati groups). All in attendance claimed that their protests are not against any particular caste/ethnicity but against the state.

May 19: The Civil Society Network for Peace organized a “goodwill rally.” Around 1000 people attended, the majority non-Janajatis. Representatives of political parties, the media, and student and youth groups were in attendance. The chairs of Tamu Dhi Nepal and the Chhetri Samaaj were also present. When commenting on the relatively small Janajati presence at the rally, an ANIJ representative said Janajatis “cannot be expected to come out en mass when there is such a feeling of identity and communal difference now.”

May 18: The Community Service Center in Bagar and the Community Police Service Center in Kaski organized a program for “ethnic goodwill” in several wards. Around 100 people attended, including representatives from political parties, civil society and schools.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

The level of tension in Pokhara appears to have increased significantly over recent days and several journalists and observers described the situation as “intensifying” and “critical.” Not all participants appear certain about what the protests are about. However mobilization seems to be relatively easy and once crowds gather they easily assume a mob mentality. Today’s confrontations between Janajati activists and the police, as well as the fact that police allowed the “United Western Region” sign to be replaced, could deepen mistrust between police and Janajati organizers.

The Tamuwan Volunteers Committees have reportedly formed a district-level committee and ward level committees in eight wards of Pokhara Municipality. Based on a list of committee members, it appears that non-Gurung Janajatis, including Magars and Tamangs, are also part of the organization.

Non-Janajati journalists are perceived to be turning against the NEFIN bandh following several attacks on journalists and their vehicles. This appears to be contributing to a split within the media between Janajatis and non-Janajatis. Though the TDN General Secretary in Pokhara claimed that all journalists are free to report on the bandh, he suggested that reporting of Janajati protests was biased and the Janajatis have been “suppressed” by the media in the past.

**Mid-Western Region team report:**

(TCC MWR team currently reporting out of Banke district. Updates for Nepalgunj and MWR Tarai districts).

*Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 21: The Joint Tharu Struggle Committee and Indigenous Nationalities Joint Struggle Committee bandhs, both demanding identity-based federalism in the Tarai, were observed as effective in Nepalgunj, and reported as effective across the Tarai districts in the MWR.

*Local Initiatives*

NTR.

*Context and Issues to Watch*

May 21: Although several different groups are holding strikes, and a number of small incidents have occurred over the last week, the atmosphere in Nepalgunj is perceived to be largely peaceful, as it has been since the beginning of the most recent round bandhs began.

**Far-Western Region team report:**

(TCC FWR team currently reporting out of Kailali district. Updates below are for Kanchanpur and Kailali districts).

*Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 20: In Kanchanpur, one Tharu cadre was injured when citizens began throwing stones from roofs while bandh enforcers were miking for businesspeople to close their shops. The Tharu cadres retreated from the bazaar to the main chowk but were confronted by a large number of businesspeople. Estimates of numbers vary, but approximately 300 Tharus (predominately women and youths) and an equal number of businesspeople were reportedly involved in the incident. Police arrived to calm the situation and a clash was avoided.

May 20: There was a tense standoff between Tharu and Unified Far West protesters in Lalpur, Kanchanpur on the evening of the 20th. The incident began several days prior when the VDC secretary refused to observe the Tharu bandh. Allegedly, when stopped by Tharu supporters in Lalpur he demanded to drive his bike and asked, “what can you people do to me?” In response, a Tharu cadre reportedly hit the front of his motorbike once with a laathi, causing damage. Tension stemming from this incident grew, with both communities gathering in Lalpur in large numbers, reportedly including approximately 200 Pahadis occupying the road and 200 Tharus occupying the roadside. A team of civil society members and politicians, including the UCPN(M) district secretary and the president of the NGO Federation, went to the site to attempt to mediate but were unsuccessful. Police were sent to the location to disperse the protesters following reports of stonethrowing and injuries. By 9pm the police had succeeded in clearing the chowk without using force.

May 21: A mass Tharu demonstration is planned for May 22 in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur, the last scheduled day of their bandh. However, a senior Maoist stated that the strike could continue if a meeting this afternoon in Kathmandu between Tharu Struggle Committee members and political leaders does not conclude in favor of Tharu demands.

May 21: Rana Tharu Samaaj has announced a demonstration in Dhangadhi on May 23 demanding that Kailali and Kanchanpur be designated as a Rana Tharu Autonomous State. The Samaaj plans to enforce a general strike on May 24 in both Kailali and Kanchanpur.

May 21: Gopal Deuba, a key leader in the Unified Far West movement in Kailali, denied that there was any plan to enforce an indefinite strike following Prachanda's backtracking from the 11-province model that had provided for a single Far-Western province. He said that if the government reaches an agreement with indigenous people to scrap the 11-province model then there would be discussions among Unified Far West leaders on how to move their demand forward.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 20: Local actors attempted to prevent a clash in Lalpur on May 20. Those involved included the president of the NGO Federation, representing the Pahadi community and the UCPN(M) district secretary, representing the Tharu community. While they were ultimately unsuccessful in preventing a clash, this is the first effort of this kind observers have heard of in Kanchanpur. Prior to this event, it was generally reported that civil society organizations were unwilling to facilitate during conflicts due to the public perception that they were biased and could face retaliation.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

Tensions between Tharu protesters and other citizens appear to be increasing in Kanchanpur. In Mahendranagar, local businesspeople reportedly acted on their own initiative when throwing stones and confronting Tharu protestors. Similarly in Lalpur, the confrontation between Tharu protestors and the Pahadi community was the result of one individual's defiance of the Tharu bandh and his efforts to rally Pahadi neighbors against the Tharu organizer. One senior political party member predicted that if the Tharu strike is not called off as scheduled on May 23 then the Pahadi community would retaliate, either by imposing their own general strike or forcibly opposing the Tharu strike in a vengeful manner. If tensions continue to increase, especially in areas with high numbers of both Pahadis and Tharus such as Lalpur, it remains to be seen whether the police will contain the situation or if stronger intervention by local leaders will be necessary to defuse possible violence.

**CONSOLIDATED OBSERVER REPORTS**  
**THE CARTER CENTER**  
**MAY 23-25, 2012**

*Note: This document summarizes recent field updates from Carter Center observers around Nepal. It is based on direct observations, stakeholder interviews, local media reports, and reports from other organizations. Please note that the information contained herein has not been fully vetted and therefore should not be considered verified.*

**Summary of Main Findings:**

- Citizens interviewed generally opposed any extension of the Constituent Assembly. Instead, they wanted political leaders to draft a constitution on time, but were mixed in their assessments of whether this could be achieved. Some interviewees were skeptical that recent agreements signed between the government and agitating groups could be implemented, given the contradictory demands of these groups, especially regarding state restructuring. (Please note: limited interviews conducted).
- The Unified Far West bandh continues to be effective in Kailali. Citizens in the region report shortages of goods and significant disturbance to daily life after nearly 30 days of continuous strikes by different organizations.
- Brahmin and Chhetri groups were reported to have visited door-to-door in Pokhara in order to mobilize people to attend a rally in Kathmandu on May 26. The rally has been called to protest the government's recent agreement with NEFIN, particularly the agreement to implement ethnic federalism, and to show concern regarding the classification of 'others' as indigenous.
- A report from Rupandehi indicates that relations between Tharus and the media may have deteriorated in the last few days in the district. A media representative alleged that Tharu leaders had called on their cadres to target the press to ensure a successful bandh following the publicity given to attacks on journalists during other bandhs. He added that both Tharu and Madhesi cadres were now acting out of the control of their leadership.
- The situation in Nepalgunj remained calm despite bandhs called by several groups, all of which have been largely ineffective in the area including the bandh called by the Broader Madhesi Front.
- In Dhankuta and reportedly in several other locations throughout Nepal, local groups are holding bandhs to advocate for the municipalities in their district to be designated as capitals of future federal states.

**Eastern Region team report:**

(TCC ER team currently reporting out of Ilam district)

*Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

May 25: Political party representatives, human rights activists and journalists in Ilam district headquarters (DHQ) said that the government was signing impractical and contradictory agreements with various groups, without regard for how they would be implemented. A senior journalist and a UCPN(M) representative assessed that these agreements could calm the situation for a short term but, according to the journalist, could have "serious repercussions" in the coming weeks. A NEFIN representative reiterated that they were firm on their demand for ethnic-based federalism. However, he was open to federalism based on multiple identities.

Interlocutors in Ilam widely agreed that the new constitution should be promulgated by May 27 and criticized the government's move to seek another extension. However, the UCPN-M representative said that even though he would like to see the new constitution promulgated on time, the option of extension should be left open. Citizens interviewed in Ilam bazaar hoped that the constitution would promulgated on time but some of them doubted that it would be, given the history of repeated extensions. Many of them expressed dissatisfaction with the recent bandhs and some hoped that the promulgation of a new constitution would end the recent turmoil.

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 25: The FLSC-Palungwa bandh was effective in Ilam bazaar from May 23-25. On the first day, movement of all vehicles was halted but from the second day onwards motorbikes were allowed to move. However, in Dhankuta, the bandh was reported to be largely ineffective.

May 25: In Dhankuta DHQ, citizens and various groups and parties have enforced a bandh since May 15 to demand that Dhankuta be made the capital of the proposed federal state. The bandh was reportedly effective from May 15-18 but has since been enforced for only 2-5 hours per day, most effectively during rallies when shops and media offices, including TV channels, are closed and vehicular movement is halted. Reportedly, the bandh was initiated by the local business community and is supported by ten political parties.

May 23: In Ilam DHQ, Dalits organized a rally and corner meeting on Wednesday to demand special rights in the constitution and to request the CDO to implement a non-discrimination policy. Around 150 people attended the rally. No tensions were observed and according to police officials the rally remained peaceful.

#### *Local Initiatives*

NTR

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

NTR

#### **Central Region team report:**

(TCC CR team currently reporting out of Kathmandu, but the update below is for Makwanpur District)

#### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

May 25: Interviewees in Makwanpur regarded the recent agreements reached between the government and different agitating groups as positive. However, they doubted that the agreements could be implemented as the accords reached with different groups contradict one another. They also felt that it would be difficult to incorporate all these agreements into the new constitution, and that doing so might invite future challenges.

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 25: All bandhs have been called off in Makwanpur. Recent bandhs held by Brahmin and Chhetri groups and Indigenous Nationalities Joint Struggle Committee (INJSC) were reported as effective in the district. The bandhs were reportedly peaceful, however a minor clash occurred during the first day of the bandh organized by the Brahmin and Chhetri groups when a Tamsaling group reportedly tried to defy the bandh. An FNJ representative said that "journalists felt more fear" during the bandh organized by INJSC as protestors allegedly threatened them while taking photographs.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 25: Interlocutors reported that political party leaders in Makwanpur urged different agitating groups to organize their bandhs peacefully.

### *Context and Issues to Watch*

While interviewees expressed fear that ethnic harmony could be disrupted in Makwanpur in the future, they said such a development was not yet evident in the district. Interviewees believed that state restructuring could potentially lead to increased tension in the district, especially between Brahmin/Chhetri groups and Janajatis. A media representative interviewed was concerned that people had little understanding about what their rights would be under a new federal set up.

### **Western Region team report:**

(TCC WR team currently reporting out of Kaski district)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

All citizens interviewed strongly opposed an extension of the constitution drafting deadline.

### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs and Security Incidents*

May 25: Brahmin and Chhetri groups were reported to have visited door-to-door in Pokhara in order to mobilize people to attend a rally in Kathmandu on May 26. The rally has been called to protest the government's recent agreement with NEFIN, particularly the agreement to implement ethnic federalism and the concern expressed regarding the classification of 'others' as indigenous.

May 25: An FNCCI representative in Pokhara reported a perception among Janajatis in town that so-called "goodwill rallies" were in fact opposing ethnic federalism.

May 25: According to a journalist in Rupandehi, relations between Tharus and the media has deteriorated in the last few days. He alleged that Tharu leaders had called on their cadres to target the press to ensure a successful bandh following the publicity given to attacks on journalists during other bandhs. He added that both Tharu and Madhesi cadres were now acting out of the control of their leadership.

May 23: A Janajati rally, attended by around 400 people, took place in central Pokhara. The event was peaceful and there were no tensions associated with it. Speakers in the program, who included the leaders of all the main Janajati organizations in Kaski, warned the government to implement the nine-point agreement signed with Janajati groups on May 21 and demanded that the constitution be drafted within the deadline.

May 22: In Kapilvastu a clash ensued between Muslim taxi drivers and the Broader Madhesi Front (BMF) bandh enforcers after cadres of the latter reportedly vandalized a taxi during the bandh.

### *Local Initiatives*

FNCCI in Kaski organized a goodwill rally on May 24.

In Kapilvastu on May 22, representatives from Madhesi Human Rights Home (MAHURI), as well as senior Madhesi and Muslim leaders in Kapilvastu, were reportedly able to prevent the clash between Muslim taxi drivers and BMF bandh enforcers from escalating.

### *Context and Issues to Watch*

NTR

### **Mid-Western Region team report:**

(TCC MWR team currently reporting out of Banke district)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

NTR

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs and Security Incidents*

May 25: The situation in Nepalgunj is calm despite three bandhs called in the Mid Western Region (MWR) by the Broader Madhesi Front, Samyukta Loktantrik Tharu Morcha, and Rastriya Nagarik Force/National Citizen Force. None of the bandhs have had any noticeable effect in Nepalgunj or much of the rest of the MWR apart from in Dang.

May 23: The United Mid-West (UMW) Struggle Committee organized a rally in Nepalgunj protesting against the implementation of ethnic states in Nepal and demanding a single Mid-Western province. The protestors intended to march to the District Administration Office to submit a memorandum to the CDO but reportedly had not obtained a route permit. Police stopped the protestors with lathi charge (batons) and the protesters threw stones at the police. At least four people were reportedly injured. There were reports that the police had similarly intervened in the motorcycle rally of UMW group on May 22, and the rally was ultimately cancelled.

May 25: Two new groups have reportedly emerged: a Struggle Committee against Ethnic Federalism (SCAEF) and a National Citizen Force. SCAEF is reportedly the Banke chapter of the United Mid-West (UMW) Struggle Committee. Meanwhile, there is very little information available about the NCF, aside from that it has announced several bandhs and protest programs.

May 23: Reportedly, a newly-formed Dang Provincial Capital Concern Committee organized an interaction program in Tulsipur to support a campaign to make Dang the capital of a new province. Additionally, various political groups have been staging rallies in Dang, such as the Joint Dalit Political Struggle Committee and the Magarat Autonomous State Struggle Committee.

May 23: A bandh called by the Karnali Autonomous State Struggle Committee was reportedly effective in Jumla. The Committee had called for a bandh on May 23 and 24 demanding a separate Karnali Autonomous State with special rights.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 24: A 'goodwill rally' was organized by associations related to pharmaceutical sales/distribution organizations.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

NTR

#### **Far-Western Region team report:**

(TCC FWR team currently reporting out of Kailali district)

#### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

May 25: Citizens continue to report shortage of goods in the market and significant disturbance to daily life after nearly 30 days of continuous strike by different organizations in the region.

May 25: Several Pahadis interviewed in the Dhangadi bazaar believed that Pahadis should continue to protest because they believe Tharu leaders have said that in a Tharu state Pahadis would have to return to the hills with only their baskets (the basket being strongly symbolic because Pahadis are said to have come to the Tarai with only baskets). Observers also noted a common perception among those interviewed that while Pahadis were voluntarily protesting, Tharu citizens were being coerced by leaders to protest. Observers were provided

several anecdotes regarding Tharu citizens being threatened with fines from the Badghar (traditional leader) for not participating in recent programs. One Tharu source told observers that Tharus were being coerced to participate, however the allegation was against the UCPN(M), not the Badghar. Regardless of the authenticity of these claims, the perception among Pahadis interviewed in Dhangadi was that Tharu citizens were not voluntarily protesting for a Tharu state. Those interviewed were pessimistic that there could be consensus between the competing Tharu and UFW demands.

May 24: Pahadi citizens interviewed in Dhangadhi opposed any extension of the Constituent Assembly. They believed the extension would lead to a continuation of the current strikes and protest programs. Some also anticipated there would be another set of protests at the conclusion of the CA's tenure. Interviewees believed that Nepal faced greater chances of unrest and disorder the longer the constitution drafting process is extended.

#### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

May 25: The strike called by Unified Far West Civil Movement Committee (UFWCMC) was highly effective on May 24-25. Shops in Dhangadhi remained closed and there was little vehicular movement. Approximately 1,000 people participated in the UFWCMC morning rally in Dhangadi bazaar.

May 24: The Joint Tharu Struggle Committee (JTSC) bandh was called off in Kailali and Kanchanpur, after the government signed a ten-point agreement with the agitating Tharu groups on May 23.

May 24: "Resident Agitators of the FW Region" launched their renewed strike in the region by holding a rally in the Dhangadi bazaar. Agitators called for an indefinite strike with full market closure. Very few shops were open in Dhangadi bazaar. It is reported shops and business in the town of Lamki remained open with the support of FNCCI and a 28-member youth squad.

May 24: RPP-N held a sit in protest in front of the DAO in Dhangadi raising four demands, most importantly that Nepal should be a Hindu kingdom and the Constituent Assembly term should not be extended. They concluded their protest by issuing a notice to the government through the Kailali CDO.

#### *Local Initiatives*

May 23: A goodwill rally organized by FNCCI was held in Kailali.

#### *Context and Issues to Watch*

There is some disagreement about whether ongoing strikes should be continued in the region, and over the enforcement of the UFWCMC strike. The Lamki bazaar remained open on May 24 and in interviews with Carter Center observers several Pahadi citizens expressed their frustration with the strike.

**CONSOLIDATED OBSERVER REPORTS**  
**THE CARTER CENTER**  
**MAY 26-29, 2012**

*Note: This document summarizes recent field updates from Carter Center observers around Nepal. It is based on direct observations, stakeholder interviews, local media reports, and reports from other organizations. Please note that the information contained herein has not been fully vetted and therefore should not be considered verified.*

**Summary of Main Findings:**

- Bandhs, rallies, protest programs, and politically-related security incidents have largely ceased across the country since May 28.
- Citizens interviewed expressed disappointment in the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and announcement of new elections. Some were visibly frustrated and angry with political leaders and the political process, and expressed doubt that new polls would result in a better outcome. Some citizens interviewed said they did not plan to vote in future elections.
- Many party representatives were also disappointed with the dissolution of the CA. However, to date there has been little public activity or protest programs at the local level by parties or identity-based organizations in response to recent political developments. Opposition parties said they were waiting for central-level directives before launching any programs.
- Kaski remained calm following tensions between competing protest programs last week and clashes between protestors and the police. However, interlocutors expressed concern that communal relations in Kaski had been damaged and that tensions could resurface in future protests. Positively, the CDO brokered an agreement to remove competing political signboards that had provoked recent clashes, and local journalists had met to discuss criticism of their role during the protests.

**Eastern Region team report:**

(TCC ER team currently reporting out of Biratnagar, Morang)

*Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

Political party representatives and civil society members interviewed in Biratnagar were unhappy with the dissolution of the CA. They said it was too early to say how identity-based organizations would respond to this development. Party representatives were reportedly waiting for directions from their central committees. An MJF-Nepal representative said the declaration of elections was unconstitutional and that “Our hope for an equal, autonomous and prosperous Madhes has been shattered by the dissolution of the CA.”

*Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

The Broader Madhesi Front (BMF) bandh continued to be effective along the highway in Biratnagar until it was called off on May 28. According to a MJF-Nepal representative, the bandh was called off “because there was no immediate way out and they could not keep people suffering.” Reportedly, the BMF bandh was also supported by the UCPN(M) establishment faction at the district level.

**Central Region team report:**

(TCC CR team currently reporting out of Kathmandu. The update below is for Parsa District.)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

There has been no immediate public reaction or protest program organized in response to current political developments in Birgunj. Local party representatives remained confused about the current situation and said that ambiguity would persist until a final decision is made regarding the proposed November election. Parties expected to come up with specific plan of activities after the final decision is made. A journalist reported that common people were shocked about the dissolution of the CA and the government's subsequent decision to hold fresh elections. Citizens have reportedly blamed all political parties for their failure to produce a new constitution and for prolonging the already protracted transitional phase.

### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

Bandhs organized by different groups in Parsa have been called off as of May 28. However, a group of people associated with Hindu Sangh have been conducting sit-in program near Ghantaghar, Birgunj demanding that Nepal be declared a Hindu state.

### **Western Region team report:**

(TCC WR team currently reporting out of Kaski district)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

Citizens interviewed in Pokhara were angry and disappointed at the government's decision to go for new elections. Much of the anger was directed towards political leaders, and frustrations centered on a sense that the CA had proven a waste of money and time. One citizen said bemoaned that the country "has been thrown ten years back." Some citizens said that they would not vote in the next election. Political party representatives in Pokhara had mixed views on the government's decision to dissolve the CA and call for new elections. The NC and UML said they were sad and shocked. An RPP-N representative seemed happy with the decision, while the Maoist representative thought that the constitution drafting process was still on track although the dissolution of CA had surprised people. The NC and UML in Kaski were reportedly waiting for central-level directives; however, they said they had also consulted among themselves to discuss future agitations.

Most civil society interlocutors believed that the recent protest programs and tensions caused a deterioration in ethnic harmony in Pokhara. Civil society representatives and journalists interviewed in Pokhara acknowledged that factors such as the ethnicity and politics of individual journalists, failure to cross-check information before reporting it, the failure of some journalists to visibly identify themselves as media observers of rallies rather than participants, and self-censorship in reporting certain information were all contributing factors to attacks on journalists and perceptions of media impartiality during the recent bandhs.

NEFIN and FNCCI representatives said that Janajatis have largely stayed away from some recent "goodwill rallies," particularly ones called by business community, because Janjatis feel accused of having disrupted social harmony and because they perceive the rallies to be against ethnic federalism.

### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

Brahmin citizens interviewed in Pokhara reported that Brahmin Samaj mobilizers for the May 26 rally in Kathmandu asked for 1000 rupees from people who could not attend the program and 500 rupees from those who could. The funds were reportedly used to cover transport and accommodation for the rally.

The Tamuwan Struggle Committee held a rally in Pokhara calling for the constitution to be drafted and the agreement with NEFIN and the Government to be implemented. Around 200 people attended and no problems were reported. Goodwill rallies were also held over the weekend by the Nepal Bar Association and students at Janapriya Campus in Pokhara; civil society and youth clubs in Hyangja, Kaski; and by FNCCI in Syangja. No incidents were reported during those events.

### *Local Initiatives*

Under a decision taken during a recent meeting of civil society, political parties and identity groups convened by the CDO in Kaski, all signboards calling for one particular state or another (e.g., Tamu or United Western Region) will be removed in the presence of civil society, police, government officials and the groups who placed them there. These signs had proven to be flashpoints during the recent bandhs.

### **Mid-Western Region team report:**

(TCC MWR team currently reporting out of Banke district)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

Citizens interviewed in Nepalgunj expressed dissatisfaction and anger toward the dissolution of CA and the government's call to conduct elections in November. However, some of them felt that there was no other option for the government considering the current political context. Many citizens felt that the turnout for the next election would be significantly lower compared to CA elections. They reasoned that people no longer trusted the political leaders. Some of them were worried that security situation might deteriorate in the upcoming days. The UCPN (M) was reportedly planning to call other parties in Banke for a meeting to seek consensus on contentious issues.

### **Far-Western Region team report:**

(TCC FWR team currently reporting out of Kailali district)

### *Local Perceptions of Recent Political Developments*

May 29: Citizens interviewed in Kailali expressed frustration with the lack of political progress but believed there would be stability and peace in the country until the time of the elections. The majority of citizens interviewed did not believe that a new election would benefit Nepal. Most were unhappy that large sums of money had been spent for the CA and the constitution and that now Nepal would once again need to seek outside funds for the purpose of a new CA. Few interviewed believed that a new CA would be able to bring change, assessing that former CA members would again receive placement on a party ticket. Some said that although new leaders from the Unified Far West (UFW) movement were in better touch with community sentiments they would have difficulty achieving success in an election.

### *Bandhs, Rallies, Protest Programs, and Security Incidents*

The UFW strike was called off in Dhangadhi from May 28, and markets and transportation reportedly remained open in all the nine districts in the region. No demonstrations or rallies were reported in response to the CA's inability to promulgate the constitution or the government's decision to hold elections for a new CA.

Some low level protest programs took place over the weekend on May 26 and 27: a sit-in protest was held at in support of the demand for a Tharu state; Unified Far West (UFW) supporters held a corner meeting and rally in Dhangadhi; in Mahendranagar, Kanchnapur business owners organized a motorcycle rally in support of the demand for a unified FWR; the Far Western Awareness Forum (FWAF) sponsored a cultural program in Baitadi district headquarters; and UFW supporters held a motorcycle rally and reportedly posted a welcome signboard at the Karnali bridge reading "Far West Autonomous State" with speakers at the rally expressing frustration toward the Maoists as the instigator of conflict and communal strife between "Pahadi and Tharu brothers."

Since May 28, demonstrations and rallies regarding state restructuring have decreased significantly since the constitutional deadline. However, state restructuring is still being debated among citizens and party leaders.