

Presented By- Shakti Kumar Banskar, President, Nepal Iqra Educational Foundation, Nepal

Respected Madam Chair, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentleman

Good evening.

I am Shakti Kumar Banskar, President of Nepal Iqra Educational Foundation, an NGO of Nepal which has been working for more than a decade in the field of empowering females through education, especially those who belong to minority groups such as Muslims. It has also advocated for the rights of marginalized groups, especially Muslims and engaged in dialogues for conflict transformation.

Muslims are a religious minority in Nepal consisting of 4.4 percent of its total population. According to Nepal Human development Report 2014, Muslims are most backward community. Backward communities need special effort to bring them out of their state. However, state has failed so far in this regard which has promoted inequality, discrimination, poverty and injustice; untouchability being one of the examples.

Muslims have been living peacefully with other communities throughout the history of Nepal. However, this situation is changing rapidly because of hate speech and intentional spreading of misinformation against Muslims resulting into violent conflicts in between communities. State is mostly engaged in damage control after violence rather than neutralizing root cause of violence. NHRIs have been either oblivious to the situation or chose to be silent spectators. Recent incident of wrongful detention and alleged suicide of a Muslim man named Hakim Shah inside police custody who was involved in interfaith marriage, handing over of his wife to her parents by police, claim of relatives of Mr. Shah that it was an extrajudicial killing, subsequent hate speech of some people justifying his death, march of people to protect perpetrators and denial of appropriate action by authorities on the pretext of a possible law and order situation has set wrong precedence.

Inclusive representation has been on paper only or has been largely symbolic making Muslims further vulnerable. Approaching elections and inclination of politics is showing worrying pattern of imitation of neighboring country to achieve political goals and a strong possibility of violent conflicts. My recommendations are:

1. Immediate action to stop hate speech and misinformation against Muslims
2. Implementation of measures to stop discrimination against Muslims in all forms.
3. Formation and implementation of programs for conflict transformation, such as nationwide dialogues between communities.
4. Amendment in constitution of Nepal to provide special status to Muslims in constitution since they are most backward community of Nepal
5. In letter implementation of Inclusive representation
6. Designing and implementation of specific plans for upliftment of Muslim community, such as allocating funds for the research on Muslim community, free access to higher education, etc.
7. Providing Muslim Commission quasi-judicial power to handle cases of discrimination.