



BHUTAN



Capital: Thimphu

Languages: Nepali, Dzongkha

Religion: 75% Buddhism; 25% Hinduism

Population: 691,141

Refugees: 104,965

Bordered by powerful China and India, the small Asian country of Bhutan is isolated amidst the grandeur of the Himalayas. People of Nepali origin, mainly from the Lhotsampas ethnic group, were systematically expelled from Bhutan during

1990-1993 because they were seen as a threat to the political order of the established constitutional monarchy. A government-sponsored plan of ethnic cleansing sparked upheaval throughout the country. Many demonstrations erupted in Bhutan as people protested the often violent measures taken by the Bhutanese government to eliminate the ethnic Nepali language and customs. Bhutan has generated one of the largest refugee crises in the world in proportion to its population.

More than 105,000 (or 6% of the total Bhutanese population) Bhutanese refugees have spent close to two decades in seven refugee camps established in Nepal and supervised by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Solutions to this enduring refugee issue such as repatriation or assimilation into Nepali society were not possible. A large scale resettlement program was initiated in 2007 and has brought thousands of Bhutanese refugees to the United States and other resettlement countries. Currently, this program is continuing to offer resettlement as the only durable solution for the Bhutanese refugees.

Bhutanese refugee students and their families have lived in a protracted refugee situation for almost two decades. Bhutanese students entering the United States school system were born in refugee camps, and have only experienced school in that setting. Schools were established in the camps and many students attended, but the schools were poorly supplied. Most classes were conducted outside and the curriculum was often in English. Students studied and completed tests, but were only able to advance to what would be the equivalent of tenth grade in the United States school system. Bhutanese families place great value on education and are supportive of their children's academic work.