

# Nepal

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	NPL00001.ZNY
<b>Date:</b>	3 March 2000
<b>Subject:</b>	Nepal: Information on Yolmo Sherpa
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Nepal / Religious persecution / Ethnic minorities / Religious minorities

**Query:**

1. How large a group are the Yolmo Sherpa of Nepal?
2. Is there a history of persecution of the Yolmo Sherpa in Nepal?

**Response:****1) How large a group are the Yolmo Sherpa of Nepal?**

The Yolmo Sherpa, also known as the Helambu Sherpa, are one of two main Sherpa groups in Nepal. They mostly inhabit high valleys in northeastern Nepal, yet have settled in Nepal's capital Kathmandu as well. The Sherpas are Tibetan Buddhists and are descended from Tibetans who migrated in the 1500s to what is now Nepal. "Sherpa," or *shar pa* in Tibetan, means "easterner," and refers to the Sherpas' origins in eastern Tibet (*Encyclopedia of World Cultures* 1992, 257).

The *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* states that the two Sherpa groups in Nepal number about 20-25,000 together, while other sources state that there are about 15-20,000 Yolmo Sherpa alone in Nepal (*Encyclopedia of World Cultures* 1992, 257; INSRIC Consultant, 25 Jan. 2000; Joshua Project 2000). Together the Sherpa groups constitute less than one percent of Nepal's total population (*Encyclopedia of World Cultures* 1992, 257).

Please see the attachments for more information on the history and culture of the Helambu Sherpa/Yolmo Sherpa of Nepal.

**2) Is there persecution of the Yolmo Sherpa in Nepal?**

A South Asia expert consulted by the RIC stated that "in general, non-Hindu groups in Nepal face unofficial discrimination in employment and education opportunities, as well as some official discrimination in language rights and other areas," but he stated that he was unaware of persecution or harassment of Buddhists in Nepal (INSRIC Consultant 25 Jan. 2000). He was aware of harassment of Christians in Nepal by Hindu fundamentalists, especially for proselytizing, but had seen nothing to suggest similar treatment of Buddhists (INSRIC Consultant 25 Jan. 2000).

According to the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal, "Sherpas from Helambu are not discriminated against...and in fact—because of the involvement of Helambu Sherpas in the trekking industry—are more prosperous on average than the general population in Nepal" (DOS 16 Feb. 2000). The embassy also stated that the Nepali human rights groups INHURED and Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) report that "Sherpas from

do not face discrimination in Nepal" (DOS 16 Feb. 2000).

According to a journalist who has written a book on Nepal, lived in Kathmandu for five years, and has traveled extensively in the country over a period of nine years, the trekking industry has not rendered the Helambu Sherpa nearly as prosperous as the Solu Khumbu Sherpa who live in the Mt. Everest region, though the Helambu Sherpa have benefited somewhat from the industry. She states that there has been an "enormous brain-drain" of Helambu Sherpa to Kathmandu and even to the U.S. and that many who are left in the Helambu region tend to be illiterate and impoverished (Journalist 24 Feb. 2000). She estimated that the two large towns in the Helambu region, Sermathang and Tharkyegang, in the last 15 years have lost approximately 80 percent of their inhabitants, with many of those left behind employed as caretakers of houses that now stand empty. She states that there is the violence and banditry in the Helambu region that one might expect to see in such a depressed area, but if there is any specific targeting of Helambu Sherpa for persecution due to their religion, ethnicity, or otherwise, she is unaware of it. She also stated that anyone in Nepal who is of Tibetan descent is generally considered to be lower on the social strata, but not necessarily less wealthy. She again emphasized that the Solu Khumbu Sherpa of the Mt. Everest region have grown wealthy, by Nepali standards, from the trekking industry, but that the Helambu Sherpa "have not enjoyed as much prosperity as their Everest [region] counterparts" (Journalist 24, 28 Feb. 2000).

The RIC was unable to find more current information on freedom of religion and/or possible persecution of Tibetan Buddhists, particularly the Yolmo Sherpa / Helambu Sherpa, in Nepal.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

#### **References:**

*Encyclopedia of World Cultures*. 1992. Vol. 3. Edited by Paul Hockings. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co.

INSRIC South Asia Consultant. New York. 25 January 2000. Email correspondence.

Journalist. New York. 28 February 2000. Email correspondence.

Journalist. New York. 24 February 2000. Telephone interview.

U.S. Department of State, Office of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives Affairs SA/INS. Washington, D.C. 16 February 2000. Fax correspondence.

#### **Other sources consulted:**

Amnesty International, *Report 1999*. 1999. London: Author.

Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 1998-1999*. 1999. New York: Author.

Human Rights Watch, *World Report 1999*. New York: Author.

U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998—Volume II*. April 1999. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Electronic sources: INSRIC databases, FBIS on-line, Internet, REFWORLD

Unsuccessful attempts to contact five oral sources.

*Last Modified 06/14/2002*