



EVOLVING NEEDS OF CONFLICT VICTIMS IN NEPAL'S TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESS

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Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)
Lalitpur, Nepal

Political Situation Update

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Publisher

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction.....1
- 2. Victims’ Needs.....4
 - 2.1 Financial Needs4
 - 2.2 Needs Related to Education and Employment.....6
 - 2.3 Health-Related Needs.....7
 - 2.4 Support in Legal Remedies.....9
 - 2.5 Benefits for Victimized Teachers and Employees.....10
- 3. Changing Needs Along the Journey to Justice11
 - 3.1 Justice Sought by Victims.....13
- 4. Government Efforts to Address Needs.....17
 - 4.1 Interim Relief.....18
 - 4.2 Works of Provincial and Local Governments.....20
- 5. Conclusion23

1. INTRODUCTION

The decade-long armed conflict initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN (Maoist)] from February 13, 1996 affected the entire Nepali society. Nearly 13,000 people lost their lives and over 1,300 were forcibly disappeared during this conflict.¹ Serious human rights violations were committed by both the state and the then-rebel CPN (Maoist) sides during the armed struggle, including killings, abductions and hostage-taking, maiming, physical and mental torture, rape and sexual violence, property damage, and enforced disappearances.

A peace agreement was signed between the Government of Nepal and the then-rebel CPN (Maoist) on November 21, 2006. In accordance with the peace agreement, the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were established. However, even after two decades of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), transitional justice has not reached a conclusion. While there has been extensive debate over its legal and structural aspects, there has been very little study and discussion regarding the needs of the victims. Transitional justice policies have consistently remained focused on the interests of political leadership and the Nepali Army rather than

¹ Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN). 2026. *Transitional Justice in Nepal: Victims' Prolonged Wait, Political Interference and Emerging Challenges*. Lalitpur: DRCN. Available at: www.democracyresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/DRCN-PSU-21-Transitional-Justice-in-Nepal-Victims-Prolonged-Wait-Political-Interference-and-Emerging-Challenges-English-Version-July-2026-1.pdf; accessed September 9, 2026.

on victims' needs, reparations, and the search for truth. On the other hand, civil society has given greater emphasis to criminal justice.²

To link transitional justice with the lives of victims, their needs must be identified. The impact of the conflict may not be equal for individuals or families who suffered similar losses, and their priorities also change over time. Therefore, rather than determining victims' present needs based on the nature of past incidents, it is necessary to understand what they consider essential today. In a case filed by Advocate Bidur Prasad Adhikari, Director of International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development (INHURED International), among others, against the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers of the Government of Nepal, challenging the decision to promote Raju Basnet, who had served as a Major at the then Bhairabnath Battalion in Maharajgunj, to the rank of Brigadier General in the Nepal Army, the Supreme Court held that addressing human rights violations cannot be considered achieved merely through the prosecution of a limited number of perpetrators. The Court further directed that truth-telling and reparations should be pursued by placing the demands and interests of victims and other concerned stakeholders at the center of the transitional justice process.³ Reparation is an indispensable element of national and international law that attempts to make a victim's life as manageable as before after an untoward event has affected them. Therefore, reparation is victim-centric and implemented according to their needs.

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) is conducting research across all seven provinces with the objective of identifying the current

² Tamang, Seira, Chiran Manandhar, and Deepti Sherchan. 2017. *We Cannot Forget: Truth and Memory in Post-Conflict Nepal*. Kathmandu: International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and Martin Chautari.

³ Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP), Nepal. 2022. *Supreme Court Orders Regarding Transitional Justice* (In Nepali). Lalitpur: CIEDP, Nepal.

needs of conflict-victims. The study focuses on the needs of families affected by killings, abductions and hostage-taking, maiming, physical and mental torture, disappearance, displacement, rape, and sexual violence by both state and rebel sides.⁴ In this study, 'conflict victims' refers to individuals directly affected by such incidents and their families. This political situation update is based on the preliminary results of the study conducted in three of the seven provinces: Sudurpashchim, Karnali, and Lumbini.⁵ This analysis focuses on how victims have understood and expressed their needs.

⁴ In the context of Nepal, the first and significant study regarding the needs of the families of persons who disappeared during the conflict period was conducted by Simon Robins. This study was based on a victim-centered methodology. Robins argues that transitional justice processes should not be limited merely to legal prosecution and elite-constructed frameworks, but the needs of victims and their families must be addressed through their meaningful participation. See: Robins, Simon. 2009. An Assessment of the Needs of Families of the Missing in Nepal. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1518504> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1518504>.

⁵ During the study, information was collected by surveying a total of 60 victims in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts of Sudurpashchim, Jajarkot and Rukum-West districts of Karnali, and Bardiya and Banke districts of Lumbini, as well as holding interactions with victims and other stakeholders. Here, 'victims' needs' represents the perspectives expressed by the study participants.

2. VICTIMS' NEEDS

A wide diversity is found in the needs of victims based on factors such as the nature of incidents, victims' educational qualifications, socio-economic status, access to the state apparatus and political parties, and involvement in human rights and transitional justice work. Based on their nature, the needs mentioned by the victims are categorized and discussed under financial support, education and employment, medical treatment, legal remedies, and justice for employed individuals.

2.1 Financial Needs

Victims stated that following the killing, disappearance, or maiming of their family's primary breadwinner, their families experienced significant economic hardship. Similarly, displacement from their homelands, torture, maiming, and sexual violence had significantly worsened the economic conditions of victims and their families.. A torture victim from Banke shared, "In the village, let alone getting a loan, no one even gives us meat on credit for a few days when a goat is slaughtered. Due to lack of money, we didn't even celebrate festivals."⁶ This reflected the economic and social standing of the victims.

During the study, instances were found where women whose husbands were killed or disappeared during the conflict were driven out of their homes with their children and denied their share of ancestral property. Legal battles further added to the financial burden of the victims. Women constituted the majority of such victims. "After my husband was killed by the Maoists, I raised four buffaloes. I used to

⁶ Interview with the victim on July 24, 2026.

wake up at three in the morning, milk them, and take the milk to the market to sell. That was how I ran the household and educated my children. Earlier, I could work hard in the fields myself. But as I grew older, I fell ill. I stopped raising buffaloes. Now I can no longer work, and my financial condition has worsened.”⁷

The financial condition of the majority of victims continues to deteriorate. Illustrating her dire economic situation after the Maoists disappeared her husband, a woman from Kailali shared:

My husband used to teach at a private school. He was also involved in politics as the ward committee secretary of CPN (UML). On May 19, 2003, the Maoists came to our home, took him away, and forcibly disappeared him. After that, my family was displaced from the village and settled in Dhangadhi. For four to five years, I searched for my husband. My son and daughter were very young. After their son was forcibly disappeared, my in-laws also broke down mentally and physically; they were in no condition to work. Later, alongside searching for my husband, I managed to educate my two children by doing manual labor in Dhangadhi. My mother-in-law passed away grieving for her son. Now, my father-in-law is dependent on me, but I have no source of income.⁸

Most victims claimed that conflict-era incidents brought disaster to lives that were otherwise running smoothly despite scarcity, forcing their families into economic crises whose effects persist to this day, making financial assistance an essential need.

⁷ Interview with the victim on July 25, 2026.

⁸ Interview with the victim on August 3, 2026.

2.2 Needs Related to Education and Employment

The children of victims were also found to have faced a very arduous journey to receive an education. Due to financial deprivation and insecurity, their studies were affected. After her husband was killed, a woman from Kailari Rural Municipality described her struggle to educate her son as follows:

After my husband was killed, my in-laws didn't say anything explicitly, but they began mistreating me through their behavior. They did not enroll my son in school until he was nine years old. When I mentioned this to a local Maoist party leader, he said, 'I will take him and enroll him in a martyr's school.' I was not in a position to keep my son away from me. Therefore, solely to educate my son, I decided to move from Kailari to Dhangadhi. There, I worked in a school hostel. The school provided free education to my son. They paid me a monthly salary of Rs. 1,500. However, the work was difficult. I had to work seven days a week from 4 AM to 10 PM. Due to the heavy workload, I fell ill multiple times. But I managed to make my child pass the School Leaving Certificate examination.⁹

Although many victims managed to provide school-level education to their children somehow, they expressed that they could not afford higher education due to their weak financial condition. During the study, three women were identified who had pursued higher education after the signing of the peace agreement. All three were survivors of sexual violence and were receiving psychosocial counselling and treatment. Nevertheless, they continued to advocate and raise their voices for the rights and concerns of survivors of sexual violence.

⁹ Interview with the victim on August 4, 2026.

As part of the interim relief measures, the state had introduced a provision to provide scholarships to up to two children below the age of 18 from each victim's family. According to the victims, however, this provision was accessible only to children attending community schools. Consequently, children of victims who were enrolled in private schools faced difficulties in accessing this support. Victims and their family members who were pursuing higher education expressed the view that the state should provide scholarships and other necessary support to facilitate access to higher education. Some victims also called for state support for the education of their grandchildren who had reached school-going age.

Most victims raised and educated their children amid great hardship. Victims expressed hope that their children would now secure employment according to their qualifications. A woman whose husband was killed during the conflict stated, "It would be good if our children were given jobs in government bodies, even as office assistants."¹⁰ Victims also pointed out the need for skill development for self-employment. However, victims showed little interest in traditional skills like tailoring or driving which had often been promoted in the past. The victims argued that the market for tailoring had weakened because ready-made clothes are available at low prices. They also considered driving training impractical for women, while even men lack the financial capacity to purchase vehicles. Therefore, they suggested that skill training should be provided keeping market demands in mind. Some victims also emphasized the need to provide entrepreneurial knowledge, necessary equipment, and seed capital.

2.3 Health-Related Needs

The findings indicate that victims require both physical and mental health care and support. Because various illnesses have appeared due

¹⁰ Interview with the victim on August 3, 2026.

to aging, victims demand that the state provide free medical treatment and access to medicines. Many injured victims still have bullet shrapnel inside their bodies. Because these injured individuals face difficulty during both summer and winter seasons, they require treatment. Victims of torture, sexual violence, and rape also need mental health care and support. Some victims shared that they are practicing stress management. Families of the disappeared also considered mental health treatment as a primary need. Describing the mental impact on her family, a woman whose brother was disappeared said:

My brother was a teacher at a government school. On March 11, 2002, the then-Royal Nepal Army made him disappear. Even after that, soldiers would come home at night and point guns at our chests. We suffered physical and mental torture. Being unable to live in the village, we came to Dhangadhi. My brother had a four-year-old son. He used to keep looking for his father and drawing his pictures. When he was studying in ninth grade, he developed depression, and we treated him with medication for a long time. He recovered for a while and even worked. But now it has relapsed. We are currently treating him. Ever since my brother was forcibly disappeared, my sister-in-law has also been taking anti-depression medication.¹¹

Similarly, a woman, who faced sexual abuse by the then-Royal Nepal Army, described her mental health issues:

In February 2006, the army entered the village and cordoned off the surrounding area. All the men fled. Thinking 'I haven't done anything wrong, what will the army do to me?', I stayed

¹¹ Interview with the victim on August 3, 2026.

home. But the soldiers physically abused me. Afterwards, they tied my hands behind my back and hit me indiscriminately with the barrel of a gun. Blood flowed from my ears and nose. They left after I fell unconscious. After that incident, I became mentally distraught. Problems like fainting periodically, severe headaches, and vomiting appeared. I even attempted suicide twice. Things became a bit easier after receiving counseling from an organization called CMC-Nepal. I have been taking psychiatric medication for eight years¹²

Compared to those without access, emotional stability could be observed among victims who had access to mental health care. Victims of various backgrounds stated that they require specialized mental health treatment and counseling.

2.4 Support in Legal Remedies

Conflict victims pointed out the need for effective legal remedies not only for cases of serious human rights violations, but also for resolving household and family disputes. In particular, wives and dependent family members of individuals killed or disappeared during the conflict were found various forms of hardship such as being driven out of their homes, being denied their rightful share of ancestral property, and not being provided with essential legal documents. Instances were also found where families refused to grant property shares, claiming that the NPR 1 million interim relief money received from the government constituted “their full share.” Such household disputes have imposed additional financial, social, and mental suffering on victimized women and their families.

¹² Interview with the victim on July 22, 2026.

In this context, free legal counseling, court representation, and assistance in obtaining documents have become indispensable. Organizations such as Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), Legal Aid and Consultancy Center (LACC), Advocacy Forum have been providing legal counseling and representation in such family disputes. Since the Free Legal Aid Bill currently under consideration in Parliament proposes prioritizing conflict victims, it is expected to address this need.¹³ Strengthening a victim-centered legal aid system to ensure easy access even in household disputes is a major present need.

2.5 Benefits for Victimized Teachers and Employees

Due to torture by Maoist forces and the state, displacement, or detention by the state, many professionals, including teachers, civil servants, and security personnel (army and police), were compelled to leave their jobs for the safety of their families. One victimized teacher reported that the number of teachers who had to leave their jobs for such reasons was 330. The teacher stated, “I have proof that the state held me in prison on multiple occasions totaling three and a half years. I received no promotion. Based on my qualifications and performance evaluation, I should be a first-class teacher today, but my period of service hasn’t even been counted.”¹⁴ Courts have ruled that displaced teachers and employees affected by the conflict should have their broken service period counted and receive benefits for that intervening duration. Following this decision, they were reinstated to their positions. However, such teachers and civil servants have still not been able to receive the benefits or promotions they would have otherwise earned during the intervening period.

¹³ See the free legal aid bill, 2026, tabled in the parliament: <https://hr.parliament.gov.np/uploads/attachments/fcprsga347tgsdu8.pdf>.

¹⁴ Interview with the teacher on July 24, 2026.

3. CHANGING NEEDS ALONG THE JOURNEY TO JUSTICE

Along with the long struggle for justice, the needs of armed conflict victims have transformed over time, age, family status, and the nature of their suffering. The needs of victims with different experiences vary to some extent. However, this does not mean that victims with similar experiences have identical needs. The needs of families of the disappeared and victims of sexual violence and rape are distinct compared to other victims¹⁵

Simon Robins, who studied the needs of families of the disappeared, argued that family members of the missing face a unique form of suffering, which he characterized as 'ambiguous loss'. In such a situation, the family does not experience the certainty of the person's death. Instead, the disappeared individual remains physically absent but psychologically present. This generates a unique type of grief in the family, as they cannot easily mourn the person's death, perform funeral rites, settle property and inheritance matters, reorganize family relationships, or achieve psychological closure.¹⁶ In the initial days, most family members of the disappeared wandered in search of their loved ones' whereabouts, spending significant time and resources. This severely impacted the economic condition of the victimized families, as well as the upbringing and education of family members.

¹⁵ DRCN is publishing a separate political context analysis on the existing problems of sexual violence victims during the conflict.

¹⁶ See: Robins, Simon. 2009. An Assessment of the Needs of Families of the Missing in Nepal. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1518504> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1518504>.

The experience of one victimized woman illustrates the multidimensional hardships faced by families of the disappeared. According to her account, her husband operated a mill in a village in Bardiya, and she was 18 years old at the time. On November 9, 2002, after the then-Royal Nepal Army took her husband from their home at night. Following his disappearance, she searched for him extensively, travelling to Nepalgunj, Tikapur, and even Kathmandu in an effort to determine his whereabouts. She stated that she had to travel while carrying rice and lentils from home and taking loans for expenses. She shared that an informant played a role in disappearing her husband, and she even took a loan to give NPR 20,000 to the informant after he promised to "find and bring him back." After her husband disappeared, the mill closed, and the care and education of her young children were severely affected. Therefore, for her, justice is not limited merely to legal action against the perpetrator; it is also tied to the economic rehabilitation of the family and the future of her children. In her words, "I need either my husband alive or his body. After that, the perpetrator must be punished."¹⁷ This statement shows that for families of the disappeared, along with truth-seeking and justice, present and future needs of the family are equally crucial.

The experience of another disappeared person's family points toward the intergenerational shift of needs. A victim from Lumbini Province, who saw his father being taken from home when he was just five years old, shared that after his father's disappearance, the family's farming stopped, his mother had to support the family through manual labor, they survived on lentil soup for days, and due to a lack of clothes, he had to wear shorts stitched by his mother from torn *petticoats*.¹⁸ Due to insecurity, his elder sister joined the Maoist party, leaving him alone at home. Despite these difficult circumstances, he pursued his education up to the Bachelor's level while doing manual labor, but he is currently

¹⁷ Interview with the victim on July 21, 2026.

¹⁸ Interview with the victim on July 21, 2026.

struggling between his desire for further studies and his responsibility toward his child's education. For him, knowing the truth about his father's status remains equally important today. However, since the individual known to be the informant has already apologized to his mother, he mentioned that his mother believes it would be better if the family received compensation rather than putting the culprit back in prison. This demonstrates that even within the same family of a missing person, priorities for justice and relief can differ depending on the generation and time.

3.1 Justice Sought by Victims

Most victims consider knowing the 'truth' about what happened to their family members as the first condition for achieving justice. Whether by the state or the Maoists, victim families expressed the view that regardless of who carried out the killing, they ought to know why, by whom, and where their family member was killed.

A woman whose husband disappeared said, "I still hold on to the hope that my husband might return. Even now, when dogs bark at night, I feel as though my husband might have come back. Until the day I am buried in the earth, I will continue to hope that my husband will return. I need information on where my husband was taken and why he was taken. If he is dead, I need his body."¹⁹ Similarly, another woman whose husband was disappeared shared:

I was 27 years old when my husband was taken from our home. Now I am 52 years old. I even filed a FIR (First Information Report) specifying who took him. Yet, despite spending 25 years seeking answers, I have still not received justice. I approached various institutions, including the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons, and provided them with all

¹⁹ Interview with the victim on July 21, 2026.

the information I had. But so much time has passed that I am beginning to forget what I had stated in my complaints to those places. Even if my husband was killed, I still need proof of it.”²⁰

In the current context, regarding what ‘justice’ means in the understanding of the victims, a question asked during the survey conducted by DRCN with 60 victims of three provinces yielded the responses shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Victims’ Perspectives on the Meaning of Justice

S.N.	Meaning of Justice	Total Selection Count
1	Knowing the truth about what happened to their loved ones	33
2	Official recognition (Conflict Victim Identity Card)	31
3	National honor	28
4	Memorialization (parks, statues, road naming, etc.)	21
5	Legal prosecution and punishment of perpetrators	19
6	Declaration/status as martyr	14
7	Public apology from the state/ perpetrators	6

In the multiple-choice question where choosing more than one option was permitted, many victims placed ‘punishment for perpetrators’ as their second or third priority. It appears that the issue of punishment arises only after the truth is known. This is why ‘knowing the truth about what happened to their loved ones’ got the first priority among the victims surveyed. Some explicitly stated, “Now evidence cannot be found, so truth itself is the main justice.” A political leader kidnapped

²⁰ Interview with the victim on July 22, 2026.

by the Maoists and a teacher whose both hands were chopped off after torture by the Maoists expressed the view in an interaction organized by DRCN in in Rukum-West that both sides should be brought together to explain why those acts were committed at that time.²¹ The kidnapped politician remarked, “I don’t say that what was done to me should be done to them as well, but I should have sat down with the person who kidnapped me to have a conversation about why I was abducted.”²² Participants in the same interaction program mentioned that although reconciliation should fundamentally occur in the transitional justice process, that work has not even commenced in 20 years.

Official recognition as a conflict victim (identity card) and national honor were placed as second or third priorities by many in the survey. Those who had not received an identity card stated that they should receive one, while those who had received it mentioned that it lacked utility. Victims demanded an identity card accompanied by facilities such as transportation discounts, healthcare concessions, and educational scholarships.

Family members of disappeared and deceased individuals desired memorial parks, statues, road naming, and martyr declarations. It was found that they regarded this as symbolic justice, reflecting the feeling that “our people were not forgotten.” A victim whose three family members were killed by state forces stated, “In the past, party members used to tell us that your family member became immortal. That means naming parks, libraries, and roads after them so that future generations can look at them, know, and take inspiration that they gave their lives in the struggle against injustice in our society.”²³ Family members of the deceased wanted to see statues of their dear

²¹ Statement expressed by the victim in an interaction program organized by DRCN in Musikot on August 11, 2026.

²² Statement expressed by the victim in an interaction program organized by DRCN in Musikot on August 11, 2026.

²³ Interview with the victim on August 9, 2026.

ones erected. A woman from Jajarkot whose son was killed said, “If I had money, I would build my son’s statue myself.”²⁴

Respondents stated demands such as: “Even if a single piece of bone were found, the rituals could be performed,” “Compensation is needed starting from the date of the incident,” “Reparations (education, health, employment) is justice,” and “A public apology should be sought and the “state should acknowledge that hardship was caused.” These responses demonstrate that justice is not merely legal punishment, but a combination of truth-seeking, reparations, honor, and memorialization.

As the passage of time has further diminished the prospects of obtaining justice, some victims who had initially advocated for the prosecution of alleged perpetrators reported that they had become increasingly exhausted. The father of a person killed by the Maoists on charges of being an informant stated during a public interaction organized by DRCN in Gulariya, “Nothing happened even though I filed a First Information Report against my daughter’s killer. I used to feel that the perpetrator should be jailed even if only for a few days, but now hope is dying out. Now I feel that a good reparations package for my family would be better.”²⁵

Most victims have changed their demands over time. Previously it was “truth and revenge”; now it has become “truth along with reparations for living.” They have repeatedly stated: peace of mind comes only after knowing the truth, and then the state must take responsibility for the survivors. This shows that in the transitional justice process, effective work by the Truth Commission, identity cards with facilities, reparations programs, and foundational work toward reconciliation (which has not even started in 20 years) are the main demands of the victims.

²⁴ Interview with the victim on August 9, 2026.

²⁵ Statement expressed by the victim in an interaction program organized by DRCN in Gulariya on July 23, 2026.

4. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ADDRESS NEEDS

To address the needs of armed conflict victims, the state has been implementing relief, financial assistance, health, education, social security, and rehabilitation programs in various phases. At the federal level, the Ministry of Home Affairs has been executing this work. Managing the records of individuals killed, disappeared, and disabled during the conflict and their families, determining the disability percentage of the injured and providing financial assistance, delivering monthly allowances to the dependent families of the deceased and injured, and providing scholarships to children also fall under the responsibility of the Ministry.

Regarding financial relief, the government provided NPR 1 million per family as interim relief to the families of individuals killed and disappeared during the conflict. The Government of Nepal's report on the Third Universal Periodic Review states that NPR 14,038,187,400 was provided as interim relief to the families of 14,368 deceased individuals, and NPR 1,219,981,600 to the families of 1,228 disappeared individuals. Similarly, government records mention that NPR 28,750,000 was provided to the families of 5,611 abducted individuals, and over NPR 1.01 billion in financial assistance was delivered to 103,771 displaced families.²⁶ This demonstrates that the

²⁶ Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. 2020. Universal Periodic Review Report (3rd Cycle) of Nepal Submitted to Human Rights Council on 12 October 2020. Kathmandu: Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, Human Rights and Treaty Division, Government of Nepal. Available at https://giwmscdntwo.gov.np/media/pdf_upload/Regarding%20posting%20of%20Nepal%27s%203rd%20cycle%20UPR_qjkxz45.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com; accessed on September 22, 2026.

state mobilized a large volume of relief to address the economic crisis generated in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.

However, relief distribution alone cannot be considered the complete basis for addressing the victims' needs. For many victims, truth-seeking, justice, identity, long-term livelihood, health, education, and social respect are equally important. To address these very needs, the TRC and the CIEDP were established. The CIEDP distributes identity cards to the families of disappeared victims and recommends relief and reparations to the government. According to the commission, out of 3,358 complaints registered so far, 756 have been settled, while 2,602 complaints are currently under detailed investigation. Enforced disappearance victim identity cards have been provided to 3,993 members of families confirmed as victims through investigation. Additionally, while recommendations were made to provide a minimum relief of NPR 1 million to 551 families who had received no relief from the government, the commission stated that only 93 families have received this relief so far.²⁷

4.1 Interim Relief

The Government of Nepal provided interim relief to the families of deceased and disappeared persons. Victims expressed dissatisfaction, stating that because the interim relief was provided in installments, it could not serve an effective purpose. Although a portion of the received interim relief money was spent on children's education, and medical treatment, many victims in Bardiya and Kailali mentioned that they

²⁷ Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN). 2026. Transitional Justice in Nepal: Victims' Prolonged Wait, Political Interference, and Emerging Challenges. Lalitpur: DRCN. Available at www.democracyresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/DRCN-PSU-21-Transitional-Justice-in-Nepal-Victims-Prolonged-Wait-Political-Interference-and-Emerging-Challenges-English-Version-July-2026-1.pdf; accessed on September 9, 2026.

managed to buy at least a small piece of land. Some victims were even found to have built small homes with it.

Describing the hardship caused to victims by providing interim relief in installments, a victim from Rajapur shared, “If the state had provided the interim relief amount in a single lump sum, they would have been able to purchase substantially larger plots of land.. Land was very cheap at that time. Many victims here were Kamaiyas (bonded laborers). The income from that land would have been enough to sustain them today. But because the money was given in installments, some of it was spent on daily household expenses.”²⁸ A victim from Kailali also mentioned that due to receiving the money in installments, she could only purchase four *dhur* (729 sq. ft.) of land in Dhangadhi.²⁹ She expressed concern that it would go to waste, as the municipality would not approve the building plans for four *dhur* of land under current standards.

Two victim families who have so far received only a partial amount of the NPR 1 million interim relief were found in Madhuwan Municipality, Bardiya. There, Gohini Tharuni’s son, Durganath Yogi, was forcibly disappeared by the state side. The state side also killed Lekhnath Pokharel. However, these two families complained that they have not been able to receive relief on par with others to date. On April 18, 2002, Gohini Tharuni received NPR 850,000 as interim relief. Similarly, Lekhnath Pokharel’s wife received only NPR 500,000. Regarding the hassle caused by the state even to obtain interim relief, Subhadra Yogi, sister of Durganath Yogi, said, “We didn’t even know that interim relief was available. I only found out about it after I grew up. After that, my mother and I repeatedly visited the District Administration Office, but we only managed to receive NPR 850,000. We are still following up at the District Administration Office for the

²⁸ Interview with the victim on July 21, 2026.

²⁹ Interview with the victim on August 4, 2026.

remaining amount. No one gives a clear answer as to why we haven't received the remaining funds. Other money holds no value for our family, but this interim relief money is the value of my brother's life, which is why I find this amount more precious. My mother must receive that money."³⁰

Many victims had apprehensions that the government might interpret the interim relief as full reparations. They expressed the view that if the government did so, it would be an injustice to the victims. During an interaction program organized by DRCN in Bardiya, a woman remarked, "If my husband were alive today, he would have earned much more than NPR 1 million. The value of my husband is not NPR 1 million. I know the person who killed my husband. Can I kill him by giving him NPR 1 million? If the government claims that interim relief is reparations, it is an injustice to us."³¹

Interim relief was only temporary support to address the immediate needs of victims. It does not guarantee complete justice. Therefore, it cannot be considered an alternative or equivalent to reparations in the justice process.

4.2 Works of Provincial and Local Governments

Along with these efforts of the federal government, provincial and local levels have also made attempts to implement programs according to their resources, priorities, and needs. Karnali Province has provided a monthly subsistence allowance of NPR 2,000 as honor and living support to conflict-affected martyrs, families of disappeared persons, and the injured.

A member of a conflict-affected family shared that Sudurpashchim Province government allocated NPR 600,000 for conflict-victim-

³⁰ Statement expressed by Yogi in an interaction program organized by DRCN in Gulariya on July 23, 2026.

³¹ Statement expressed by the victim in an interaction program organized by DRCN in Gulariya on July 23, 2026.

targeted programs in the fiscal year 2024/2025, officials called them toward the end of the fiscal year for advice on how to utilize the allocated budget; a program was formulated to cover health insurance for victim families.³² According to her, because the timeframe was extremely short, only a limited number of victims became aware of this program; on the other hand, since agreements had to be signed at the provincial Ministry of Internal Affairs, the process proved cumbersome and more expensive than the benefits received for victims living across the province. Although the provincial government continued the same program in the fiscal year 2025/2026, many victims stated that they did not renew the health insurance due to its tedious nature. This demonstrates that merely announcing programs for victims is not enough; accessibility and implementation procedures must also be simple and victim-friendly.

At the local level, various programs targeted at the livelihood, social security, and honor of conflict victims have been implemented. In particular, local units led by the CPN (Maoist Centre) were found to have formulated such victim-focused programs. Rajapur Municipality in Lumbini Province was found to be a pioneer in creating programs for victims. The municipality provided a monthly allowance of NPR 3,000 for victims, distributed livestock (buffaloes, goats, pigs) worth NPR 50,000, organized annual honor programs for victims, conducted an annual picnic, offered psycho-social counseling services repeatedly, and implemented health insurance programs for victims.

Memorialization efforts such as constructing parks and developing local curricula to teach the biographies of martyrs and disappeared persons in schools were also undertaken. Similar initiatives were launched by Bansgadhi Municipality in Bardiya as well. In Barhabardiya Municipality of the same district, content on martyrs and missing persons has been included in the local curriculum for grades 6 and 7.

³² Interview with the victim on August 3, 2026.

During field research, conflict victims also demanded that local levels allocate a dedicated budget for victims. This indicates that victims' needs are not confined to cash relief alone, but are also deeply linked to education, health, livelihood, social honor, memory preservation, and identity.

Looking at it this way, although various programs for conflict victims have been operated by federal, provincial, and local levels, there is a lack of uniformity in their nature, accessibility, and implementation. It appears necessary to clarify tiered responsibilities: the federal level should prepare the policy and institutional framework for relief, record-keeping, truth-seeking, and reparations; the provincial level should coordinate health, social security, and rehabilitation programs; and the local level should implement livelihood, education, health, and social rehabilitation initiatives. Designing reparations programs based on identifying the actual needs of victims ensures effectiveness, while inter-tier coordination prevents the duplication of similar benefits across different government levels. A comprehensive national policy on reparations is necessary to identify victims, address their immediate and long-term needs, ensure coordination among all levels of government, and provide clear guidance to fulfill Nepal's constitutional and international obligations regarding victims' rights to justice and reparations.³³

³³ Advocacy Forum-Nepal. 2025. Past Impunity is Present Impunity is Future Impunity in Nepal. Available at www.advocacyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/impunity-report-nov-2025.pdf, accessed on September 27, 2026.

5. CONCLUSION

Even as two decades approach since the end of the armed conflict, transitional justice has not reached a conclusion. Therefore, the pain and problems of conflict victims remain unchanged. However, their priorities regarding justice and reparations have shifted somewhat. In the immediate aftermath of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, truth-seeking about the incidents, legal action against perpetrators, and immediate livelihood crises were the primary concerns for victims. With the judicial process remaining unresolved for a long time, the question of justice for many victims today has become intertwined with the economic, physical, and familial crises of daily life. Thus, current needs require not merely addressing past events, but a comprehensive approach that addresses the present lives of families weakened by the pain of conflict as well as the future of coming generations.

The study shows that most victims desire financial support, employment, skills training, seed capital for enterprise, higher education for their children, and free healthcare. Although victims identified a range of needs as their immediate priorities, these should not be understood as substitutes for justice. They continue to regard the right to know the truth about what happened to their family members as a fundamental prerequisite for justice. Particularly for families of the disappeared, the demand for “either breath or a body” demonstrates that the question of justice is still alive, while for victims of sexual violence, formal recognition as victims by the state forms the primary foundation of justice. On the other hand, prolonged waiting and frustration with the judicial process have led some victims to prioritize reparations over prosecution. This indicates that victims’ perceptions

of justice are not static, but evolve with time, age, economic condition, the nature of the incident, and their experience with seeking justice.

Another critical aspect is that because interim relief was merely funds provided to victims for immediate support, it can never be considered an alternative to reparations under transitional justice. Therefore, an integrated, long-term policy that acknowledges the changing needs of victims and encompasses truth disclosure, reparations, healthcare and psychosocial support, legal assistance, education, employment, and livelihoods is essential. Prioritizing confidentiality, security, formal state acknowledgment, and psychosocial support is particularly vital for victims of sexual violence and rape.

It is also necessary to coordinate the various programs initiated by provincial and local governments with the federal transitional justice process to ensure they are grounded in the actual needs of victims.

Founded in 2014, Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) is a national non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and research of social and political issues. Since its establishment, DRCN has consistently undertaken in-depth and evidence-based research into various aspects of Nepal's transitional political landscape, including the implementation of federalism, local-level restructuring, and election observation. The outcomes of these studies are shared with stakeholders, fostering discussions and debates. DRCN's overarching objective revolves around advancing efficient governance within Nepal's federal framework through these rigorous research endeavors and thoughtful discourse.



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