

Conflict, Transition and Possibilities for Peace in Nepal: challenges to engagement, practice and scholarship

On 3-4th July 2010, Martin Chautari and Social Science Baha jointly hosted an international conference entitled ‘Conflict, Transition and Possibilities for Peace in Nepal and South Asia: challenges to engagement, practice and scholarship’ at the Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu. The event, which received some financial support from International Alert, was the first to bring together researchers working on various aspects of Nepal’s post-conflict transition and offer them the opportunity to feed back and discuss their findings with representatives of international organisations. The conference sought to stimulate public and academic debate on the role, relevance and effect of policies and approaches mobilised to steer Nepal’s ‘transition’, as well as encourage more productive engagement between academic researchers and practitioners working around these issues.

Presentations addressed a wide range of issues, including the following: policy approaches to ‘child soldiers’; I/NGOs and widows’ voices in Nepal; Victims’ mobilization; Limitations of human rights and transitional justice discourses; the Ritualisation of peace-building among donor agencies; Ethnic Classification and Affirmative Action in Nepal’s Post-Conflict Period; transformations of the Maoist movement post-2006 (including a reflection of UNMIN’s role in this process).

Several of the papers developed critiques of dominant approaches to peace building. They drew attention to the overshadowing of individual agency of conflict victims and young former combatants by institutions designing programmes to address their needs. Several also highlighted the lack of attention to the local meanings of key terms used within the ‘peace building community’ (‘post-conflict’, ‘reconciliation’, ‘peace’), how these terms are gendered and ethnicised and the consequences for peacebuilding efforts of the use of such terminology by national and international actors.

The organisers were heartened to find that the conference was attended by persons such as the head of OHCHR in Nepal, DfID, ICRC and representatives from DANIDA and UNMIN, among others, and that many returned on the second day. Nepali scholars, activists and students made up the rest of the audience. Overall, it appears that the event was well received, and the possibility for further such conferences or follow up workshops in the years ahead is already being discussed.

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