

Role of the National Human Rights Commission for the Protection of Human Rights in Nepal

Saroj Kumar Giri

Lecturer

Department of Law

Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: advocatesarojgiri@gmail.com

Abstract

The article aims to analyze the role of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal. As a constitutional body, NHRC has the key role in the effective protection of the rights of the people which are safeguarded by the constitution and scattered laws. Article 249 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has clearly mentioned that it is the duty of the National Human Rights Commission to ensure the respect, protection, and promotion of human rights and its effective implementation. National Human Rights Commission Act, 2012 provides authority to NHRC to protect and promote human rights through inquiries and investigations based on the complaint lodged to the commission by the victim or any person on his/her behalf or upon information received from any source or on its own initiative. Despite the formulation of laws related to human rights, the implementation side is complicated. Use of children in the election, discrimination, labor exploitation of foreign migrant workers, and cases of domestic violence are increasing and the condition of earthquake survivors and the corona pandemic is more pathetic. Thus, the article argues that impunity still persists and the NHRC recommendations have not been implemented and it has not been able to work as per the constitutional mandate. The finding of the study is human rights situation of Nepal is still worrying. The analysis is significant as it helps to understand the human rights situation in Nepal and the functional role played by NHRC to protect human rights as the constitutional commission.

Keywords: human rights, constitution, violation, recommendation, protection, reconciliation

Introduction

Human rights in simple language can be regarded as those fundamental rights to which every man or woman living in any part of the world is entitled by virtue of having been borne as a human being. Robertson (1972) defined as human right is a genus to which humanitarian law is a species. The former relates to the basic rights of human beings everywhere, at all times, and the later relates to the rights of particular categories of human beings, particularly the sick, the wounded, prisoners of war during armed conflicts and hostility. Keptein (1993) argued that in common parlance, human rights may be said those rights which are inherent in the people by virtue of their being human beings, the rights that are required for the full and complete development of human personality.

Parajuli (2013) opined those human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. All human beings are equally entitled to human rights without discrimination. Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by international law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. Many countries include a section on human rights or fundamental and freedoms in their Constitutions. Human rights are inalienable. Human rights are not a gift from the state, and the Government can neither violate them nor take them away arbitrarily. They should not be infringed upon, except in specific exceptional situations and according to due process, and within strict parameters of necessity and proportionality. For example, the right to liberty may be restricted if a person is found guilty of a crime by a court of law. Human rights include civil (individual freedom), political (the right to hold meetings, establish organizations, hold and participate in elections), economic (right to food and residency), social (education, health) and cultural (language, culture, traditional practices) rights along with rights relating to development (access to natural resources, equal distribution and use of the benefits of development and scientific inventions), environment (clean atmosphere and environment) and peace (free from violence and conflict). The

designation as ‘fundamental rights’ often signifies that a constitution affords certain rights only to citizens of the country. However, this does not mean that internationally recognized and binding Human Rights are limited thereby.

Some Human Rights are formulated as individual rights against the state. They have to be accompanied by effective remedial provisions to deal with the violations of such rights. This claim includes rights such as the right to life and physical integrity, equality before law, and individual freedom of speech and expression. In normal circumstances, if the state does not interfere these rights could be fully enjoyed. The state cannot have arbitrary interference on individual matters. It also has a responsibility to protect people under its jurisdiction from Human Rights violations by non-state actors. Other rights imply that the state it also means that the state has the responsibility to work for the all-round development of its citizens. Such responsibilities include right to social security and the right to education, health and employment. Only by ensuring these rights in a pro-active, organized and consistent manner individuals would be able to exercise their rights against the state independently. In addition to listing substantive human rights and freedoms, constitutions also often include procedural and institutional provisions which help to give effect to the substantive rights provisions. Thus, constitutions may foresee systems for judicial remedy, lay down state responsibility for Human Rights protection and promotion, and establish independent national human rights institutions. Other provisions may relate to the incorporation of international human rights treaties in the national legislation and their applicability and direct effect for individuals.

Statement of the Problem

The countries under the authoritarian regimes were either under communist rule, military dictatorship, or absolute monarchy. Dictatorial administration of all those regimes indiscriminately ignored the values and culture of human rights. Abuse of human rights and fundamental freedoms was the basic norm of administration. People in general were denied their inherent human rights by means of abuse of power and gross mismanagement and misappropriation of national resources. These administrations put a number of restrictions on the development of individual human potential by enjoying human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Khanal (2006) argued that the idea of the formation of National Human Rights Commission was a least priority government agenda. Few countries that formed the

commission had developed in the form of showcase giving very limited power. The commissioners of those commissions were committed to implement government policies and directives. In reality such commission was unable to work against the interest of the administration. Poorly infrastructures, resources, information, research, documentation facilities and lack of skilled and expert personnel were other major problems with the commission. Nepal faces serious human rights challenges related both to the failure to deliver transitional justice to the thousands of victims of the armed conflict and to deep-rooted structural problems that were a root cause of the conflict. Ten years after the end of the 1996–2006 conflict between the government and the Maoists, very little progress has been made on addressing the numerous unresolved cases of extra-judicial killing, torture, forced disappearance, internal displacement and abduction from that period. Alongside this, the deep-rooted hierarchical power structures, discrimination, and social and economic inequality mean that human rights abuses continue to be commonplace in Nepal, particularly against women, Dalits, Janajas, Madhesis, disadvantaged, minorities and other marginalized communities.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was set up in 2000 as the high-level body for protecting human rights in Nepal. It has a key role to play in advocating for transitional justice for conflict victims and heightening respect for the human rights of all citizens. This is a challenging task as the human rights situation remains precarious and a culture of impunity prevails with many serious human rights cases awaiting investigation.

The denial of human rights is not only an individual and personal tragedy, it also creates conditions of social and political unrest sowing the seeds of violence and conflict within and between societies and nations and as such as a result of work of government, non-government, national, regional and international organizations around the globe human rights transcend national boundaries and jurisdiction and thereby go beyond the jurisdiction of a particular nation's public law.

The charter of the United Nations imposes clear, compelling, legal obligations on all member-nations/states to promote economic and social development and human rights through collective and individual efforts. The human rights groups throughout the world are performing commendable tasks drawing attention to violation of human rights and taking steps to implement these rights, protecting one against person, repressive society and polluted environment, and above all, man-made bad laws. But what is needed is action derived from

collective wisdom if we are to bequeath a happy peaceful and developed world. To attain the goal, equal protection of law, equal and reasonable opportunities for everybody to avail the course of law to improve out quality of life is a must.

A successful investigation to find out proper guidance for protection and promotion of human rights for peace and development in the world is an international human need. Nepal has also ratified numerous human rights related conventions and treaties showing the commitment to protect and promote the human rights in Nepal. In this ground, the researcher has set certain research question to analyze the role of National Human Rights Commission in the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal:

- Is the role of National Human Rights Commission is enough to protect and promote the human rights in Nepal?
- Are the constitution's provision, acts, rules, policies and provisions sufficient to face the challenges and problems to protect and promote the human rights in Nepal?
- Whether National Human Rights Commission's recommendations are properly implanted or not?

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to analyze the role of the National Human Rights Commission for the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal. Besides this general objective of research has set some specific objectives which are as follows.

- To analyze the role and contribution of the National Human Rights Commission for the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal
- To find out the constitutional and other legal provisions pertaining to the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal.

Review of Literature

The Paris Principles do not define NHRI (National Human Right Institutions), however, present a functional explanation of human rights protection and promotion. 'The protection role includes receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints; mediating conflicts, and monitoring the protection of the rights,' according to the General Observations of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation, International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for

the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2013). Education, outreach, the media, publishing, training and capacity-building, as well as advising and aiding governments are all part of the promotional function.

Bhandari (2015) in practice, the institutional structure and roles of NHRIs differ amongst countries, according to their socio-political and historical contexts. In measuring the success of NHRIs in safeguarding and promoting human rights in both conflict and post-conflict or normal/peaceful situations, the institution's structure and mandate are critical. International certification of NHRIs is based on the mandate, as well as the organization's independence and methods of operation. Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (1993) said that the institutional structure of NHRIs can be examined from a variety of angles. The composition, role, and operation methods of NHRIs are substantially determined by the category to which they belong.

Roberts (2013) claimed that despite the fact that the Paris Principles specify basic standards, state practices in establishing and implementing NHRIs differ. Variations are mostly related to the context, requirements, and commitments of individual countries. However, with the establishment and implementation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the Human Rights Council in 2008, there is increasing pressure to establish and adhere to the Paris principles.

The debate is still ongoing whether national human rights institutions should be judicial state body or non-judicial state body. Nowak (2013) said that "NHRIs are non-judicial state entities established to help states meet their commitments to respect, protect, and fulfill citizens' rights" (p 13). Wouters et al. (2013) writes that because of their differences from states, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations, NHRIs are described as occupying a "fourth place" in the international human rights framework. Goodman et al (2012) describes that NHRIs serve as a vital link between the idealistic claims of international human rights values and their domestic implementation in the face of political realities. They are also important in terms of shaping international human rights norms because they participate in and negotiate with various international mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council.

Meyer (2012) argued that NHRIs are characterised as 'a conduit for transmissions of international norms and information, a locus of making human rights claims' where people can make complaints and redress grievances. As an actor NHRIs can function as a watchdog, an

editor, a promoter, and an administrative overseer. Nowak (2013) summarizes that NHRIs are charged with promoting human rights, advising the executive and legislative branches, and ensuring that international norms are followed. Their responsibilities include conducting awareness-raising and human rights education initiatives, releasing a status and yearly report on the state of human rights, and starting preventive actions such as pre-detention visits. Durbach (2009) argue that states have recently recognized the importance of NHRIs as key players in the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements and post-conflict transitional arrangements in countries emerging from civil wars and regional conflicts. The Paris Principles urge for NHRIs to have a "wide mandate" that allows them to deal with all human rights without discrimination, including a duty to promote, safeguard, and even address individual complaints, as well as access and investigative powers into suspected human rights breaches. Parlevliet (2006) opined that the Paris principles, it is maintained, also give the independence and autonomy that must be safeguarded by national legislation. In fact, all NHRIs share a common overarching goal: to safeguard and promote human rights in their respective countries. In general, NHRIs help the government formulate policies, examine legislation for accordance with international standards, and assist victims seeking legal remedy.

According to Birgit et al. (2001) the The Paris standards are both a necessary minimum and a useful path map. However, they can only be referred to as a minimal threshold because the dispute has mostly been normative and legal in nature, rather than analytical and comparative. Hossain et al. (2000) argued that the Paris Principles are also known as the national institution's normative framework. However, an assessment of these institutions' efficacy can and must be based not only on their theoretical adherence to the Paris Principles but also on their actual performance. NHRCs have been the subject of much comparative research. For example, the International Council on Human Rights Policy and the Danish Centre for Human Rights have both conducted research. Research by a group of United Nations law experts was just published.

Research Methods and Materials

The study's nature necessitated the use of both analytical and descriptive research approaches. Secondary data were collected from the publications of NHRC, annual reports, synopsis and booklets which describes achievements, challenges, and the way forward set for the NHRC. The primary source of literature was the texts of national and international

documents, as well as their connected clauses. Other sources of information, such as books, reports, and commentaries, were also used.

Results and Discussion

Nepal's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is a constitutionally independent and autonomous authority. The Human Rights Commission Act of 1997 created it as a statutory authority in the year 2000. (2053 BS). The NHRC was made a constitutional body by Nepal's Interim Constitution of 2007 (2063 BS). It is also recognized as a constitutional body even in the present Constitution of Nepal, 2072. In the country's constitutional and judicial framework, it has its own set of obligations. These obligations are in addition to those of the Nepalese government's standard machinery of justice, including the Supreme Court, Attorney General's Office, Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, and other executive, quasi-judicial, and judicial bodies.

The Commission was established in response to a United Nations-sponsored gathering of delegates from national institutions in Paris in 1991, which established a specific set of principles on the position of national institutions, known as the Paris Principles. These principles, which were later endorsed by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Resolution 1992/54 of 3 March 1992) and the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993, annex), have served as the foundation and reference point for the establishment and operation of the Nepalese National Human Rights Commission.

The Commission's foundation and composition are in accordance with the law. The Commission's establishment and composition meet the minimum conditions outlined in the 'Paris Principles.' Independence guaranteed by legislation or constitution; autonomy from the government; pluralism, including in membership; a broad mandate based on global human rights norms; and strong investigative powers are just a few examples. The Commission is charged with protecting and promoting the human rights of Nepali people under Article 132 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal. In order to fulfill this duty, the Commission can conduct inquiries and investigations on its own or in response to a petition or complaint filed with it regarding human rights violations and abetment, as well as carelessness and negligence in the prevention of human rights violations by any person, organization, or authority. It can also investigate an issue with the consent of the court in relation to any accusation of human rights breaches that is now before the court. The Commission has the authority to visit and observe

any authority, jail, or organization under the control of the Nepalese government, and to make necessary recommendations to the government on how to reform the functions, procedures, and physical facilities that may be required for the protection of human rights.

In Nepal, several standards, institutions, and procedures have been established to ensure the protection of basic human rights. However, putting these rights into practice and ensuring that they are effectively exercised by Nepalese citizens has proven to be a difficult task. Newly developing difficulties may include the need to widen the scope of human rights and lay the groundwork for their institutionalization so that all forms of human rights are protected. Other legislation or administrative regulations, some of which continue to be in conflict with the Constitution's current human rights provisions, can also have an impact on human rights.

Aside from these powers, the Constitution states that the Commission may study the Constitution's and other prevailing law's provisions on safeguards for the enforcement of human rights and make necessary suggestions for their effective implementation. The power entails studying international human rights treaties and instruments and making required and relevant suggestions to the government for effective implementation of the provisions. As such, it has the authority to make required recommendations to the Nepalese government about reports that must be submitted in accordance with international human rights treaties. In terms of Nepal's requirement to submit reports under international human rights treaties, the government is required to submit reports after receiving the Commission's opinion.

The Commission is also responsible for conducting or causing to be conducted human rights research and assessing the country's current human rights condition. It may use various seminars, symposia, and conferences to advertise and propagate human rights education across diverse groups of society, as well as to raise understanding and consciousness about the legal protections for human rights. The Commission also has the jurisdiction to assist non-governmental organizations in their operations and endeavors. Furthermore, the Commission has extensive authority to participate in whatever activities it deems necessary and appropriate for human rights enforcement, promotion, and preservation.

The Commission has one Chairperson and four other members; all of them are full time appointees, who are appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. The Secretary of the Commission is the focal point for the administration. The

Commission has the authority to appoint staff as needed to carry out its duties. If the Commission asks a government office for help in carrying out its duties, that office must comply.

The Commission's funding is funded by the Nepalese government. However, the Commission may obtain such means and resources as are essential for the discharge of its activities through grants from other entities. The Commission's accounts will be audited by Nepal's Auditor General.

National Human Rights Commission act and its Jurisdiction

National Human Rights Commission Act, 2012 provisioned the mandates or duties of the Commission that the primary responsibility of the commission is to respect, protection and promotion as well as effective implementation of human rights through inquiries and investigations based on the petition or complaint lodged to the commission by the victim himself/herself or any person on his/her behalf or upon information received from any source or on its own initiative. These complaints should be based on the violation of human rights and abetment and carelessness or negligence in the prevention of violations of the human rights by any person, organization or authority concerned. Likewise, though it is not clearly mentioned in Act, the NHRC is authorized to visit, inspect and observe any authority, jail any organization under Government of Nepal, and to submit necessary recommendations to the Government of Nepal on the reform to be made on the functions, procedures and physical facilities which may be necessary for such an organization for the protection of human rights. For the effective implementation of human rights provisions enshrined in the legislations, NHRC can review the provisions on safeguards provided by the Constitution and other prevailing laws for the enforcement of human rights and submit necessary for the effective implementation of such provisions. In order to implement the international human rights standards norms in the country, NHRC is authoritative to study international treaties and instruments on human rights and submit the necessary and appropriate recommendations to the Government of Nepal and evaluate the existing human rights situation of the country.

NHRC on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was created as a statutory and autonomous agency in 2000 under the Human Rights Commission Act 1997 as an institutional

framework to safeguard and promote human rights. The Interim Constitution has granted the Commission constitutional status, with extended mandates to supervise the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed by the government of Nepal and the CPN-Maoist in November 2006, as well as the election of the constituent assembly in terms of human rights.

The fundamental responsibility of the Commission is to protect and promote human rights in the country. It has the authority to probe incidents of human rights violations or any attempt to violate human rights, or negligence or recklessness committed by any person, institution or organization relating to human rights. With regards to procedural matter, the Commission has powers similar to that of the court for the purpose of taking action on petitions, complaints and conducting fact-finding missions.

The National Human Rights Commission regularly undertakes observation and fact-finding investigations in various sections of the country, and then publishes and disseminates reports based on its findings. Through different sensitization and training initiatives, the Commission has been active in developing human rights awareness and imparting human rights expertise. It holds public hearings and frequently presents suggestions and instructions to the government in order for the government to act to alleviate the suffering of victims of human rights violations.

The National Human Rights Commission can play a critical role in the impartial monitoring of the National Human Rights Action Plan's implementation. It is mandated to this task by its enabling Act for the effective enforcement, protection, and promotion of the Constitution's and other prevailing laws' Human Rights. GoN can supply the Commission with the essential statistics and information for oversight and monitoring. The Commission has the authority to conduct inquiries and investigations into human rights violations, abetment, and carelessness or negligence in the prevention of human rights violations by any person, organization, or authority.

It is also required to visit, inspect, and observe any authority, jail, or organization under the control of the Nepalese government, and to make necessary recommendations to the government regarding necessary steps to be taken to protect human rights, as well as to review the Constitution's and other prevailing laws' provisions on safeguards for the enforcement of human rights, and to make necessary recommendations for their effective implementation.

It is also mandated to study international treaties and instruments on human rights and submit necessary and appropriate recommendations to the government for effective implementation of the related provisions, evaluate the existing human rights situation of the country and make necessary recommendations to the government regarding reports to be furnished by Nepal as its obligations under the international human rights treaties to which it is a party.

The Act states that when it comes to Nepal's obligation to submit reports under international human rights treaties, the government of Nepal (then His Majesty's Government) must submit reports after getting the Commission's opinion. It also states that the National Human Rights Commission has the authority to independently supervise the NHRAP's implementation.

In order to preserve and promote human rights, the NHRC has numerous duties and responsibilities to play and fulfill. However, it needs to concentrate on two things right now. On the one hand, it must carry out its regular duties of protecting and promoting human rights; on the other hand, it must ensure that those who grossly violated human rights and committed violence during Maoist conflicts, Madhes movements, illegal detention and killing by police personnel, and a series of other cases that occurred over time are held accountable. The NHRC is legally unable to take retaliatory action against any human rights offenders on its own.

It has pressed the government to pass legislation requiring the adoption of its proposals. However, the constitution and the National Human Rights Commission Act do not give the NHRC the authority to make required recommendations. As a result, if the NHRC's recommendations are not followed, impunity will continue to exist. The NHRC has repeatedly stated that it will blacklist rights offenders in recent years, but it must begin doing so now if it is to successfully protect human rights.

Implementation Status of Recommendation

The situation of human rights in Nepal could have been different if the recommendations of NHRC were binding for the government. The recommendations are still persuasive and government can use discretionary power whether to file a case or not against human rights violators. In some of the cases Supreme Court had given an order to investigate properly and file a case in competent court too.

National Human Rights Commission's Annual Report Synopsis (2020-2021) says under protection of human rights, the NHRCN monitors the human rights situation and investigates complaints of human rights violations. Based on the facts of the investigation, it has been recommending the government or the concerned body for necessary action. Although the implementation of the recommendations, decisions or orders of the NHRCN is legally binding, the implementation status is not satisfactory.

Despite repeated discussions and debates on this issue, no conclusion has been reached. The status of the NHRCN recommendations to the government for implementation is very weak. Looking at the situation from July 2000 to 2020, the implementation status of the recommendations is found to be very low. Of the 12,825 complaints registered with the NHRCN during the period, 6,617 were resolved and 1,195 were recommended for legal action against the perpetrators and provide compensation to the victims.

Overall, the recommendations that are fully implemented is 13.64 percent, partially implemented is 37.23 percent and 50 percent of the recommendations have not been implemented. Recommendations that are implemented are often concerning providing monetary compensation. Recommendations that have been made to take legal action against those involved in human rights violations and to investigate the incident and take legal action are not implemented. Not only that, it is ironic that some government officials who have been recommended for action have been promoted instead of being punished.

Conclusion

Human rights are those that are required for normal human existence and survival. They are founded on the idea that every man and woman, regardless of caste, faith, color, ethnicity, or nationality, is born with certain fundamental rights, such as the right to live, the right to speak, the right to freedom, and the right to justice. As a result, these rights are inscribed in the countries' constitutions. Soon after its founding, the United States Organization developed a Charter of Human Rights to ensure that these fundamental rights are respected and upheld by all nations.

Some of these essential human rights are enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. These include the right to life, liberty, and security of person, the right to freedom of expression,

judicial recourse, freedom of movement, and the right to participate in the administration of one's country, among other things. Economic and social rights are the second sorts of rights. These include the right to work, the right to a dignified life, the right to relaxation and recreation, the right to education, equal compensation for equal effort, and the right to equality, among others.

The issue with human rights is that different people and countries have varied interpretations of the phrase and how it should be protected. Political and civic rights are not guaranteed to all people in various countries. Because economic and social rights are not implemented in some countries, the underlying principle behind emphasizing human rights is that all governments should strive to preserve these fundamental rights and ensure that all forms of discrimination are eradicated.

Every government has a fundamental responsibility to protect and maintain human rights. International organizations and watchdogs, such as the United Nations, the International Human Rights Commission, and others, can play an important role in ensuring that these fundamental rights are implemented. Ones, particularly democratic countries, must band together in this regard and adopt the necessary persuasion and even coercive measures to ensure that people, organizations, and countries all over the world respect these fundamental human rights.

The National Human Rights Commission, an independent constitutional authority, is responsible for the preservation and promotion of human rights in Nepal. The National Human Rights Commission can play a critical role in the impartial monitoring of the National Human Rights Action Plan's implementation. It is mandated to this task by its enabling Act for the effective enforcement, protection, and promotion of the Constitution's and other prevailing laws' Human Rights. GON can supply the Commission with the essential statistics and information for oversight and monitoring.

The Commission has the competence to conduct inquiries and investigations into human rights violations, abetment, and carelessness or negligence in the prevention of human rights violations by any person, organization, or authority. It is also required to visit, inspect, and observe any authority, jail, or organization under the control of the Nepalese government, and to make necessary recommendations to the government regarding necessary steps to be taken to protect human rights, as well as to review the Constitution's and other prevailing laws'

provisions on safeguards for the enforcement of human rights, and to make necessary recommendations for their effective implementation.

In the NHRC, there is a lack of efficiency, accountability, accomplishment, and institutional competency. The National Human Rights Commission is unable to carry out its constitutional and legal responsibilities. To demonstrate this, we can say that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has never seriously questioned government officials and opposition political parties, particularly the Maoists, who are considered to be among the worst human rights violators, including those who ordered, or were directly or indirectly involved in, mass killings, rapes, and destruction of public property during the ten years of conflict. The NHRC has also failed to seriously confront the government's ongoing practice of impunity.

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