

A Haliya battle won

In a landmark declaration, the newly formed government led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) abolished the Haliya system (a form of bonded labor) on 6 September 2008. A five-point agreement was reached between a group of agitating Haliyas and the government the previous day.



It was indeed a matter of celebration for the “liberated” Haliyas who are mostly Dalits (“untouchables”). The freed Haliyas, who were in Kathmandu to shore up their movement, were quick to celebrate the historic occasion with vermilion powder and garlands. Their six-year long movement against labor exploitation and oppression had won a battle.

The peace and labor ministers had assured the agitating Haliyas in Kathmandu at the time of declaration of liberation that the government would not let the freed Haliyas face the fate of the freed Kamaiyas (another group of bonded laborers) who are still loitering in search of livelihood and rehabilitation.

Around 18,000 Haliya families will be affected by this declaration. Their population is concentrated in far-west Nepal.

The Haliya Movement, which had formally kicked off six years ago in far-west Nepal, has been receiving LWF Nepal’s support since 2003. This year the organization is providing support to the Haliyas under its two development projects: Sustainable Livelihood Improvement Project, and Peace, Reconciliation and Human Rights Project.

Liberation is just the first battle. There are many battles to brave. Social and rights activists, and noted political leaders have said many times, including on the platforms provided by LWF Nepal, that the actual liberation of Haliyas can be lived

out by giving them education, employment opportunities, land, house and other essentials for a life of dignity.