

## Villages declared untouchability-free



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MYAGDI: With a view to developing a society based on equality and justice by ending deep-rooted caste discrimination, Dalit Janasewa Samaj Nepal (DJSN) and Dalit Network for Social Justice Bhagawati (DNSJB), with financial assistance from Plan Nepal, an NGO, declared Rankhupiple and Bhagawati VDCs 'untouchability-free' yesterday.

According to DNSJB programme coordinator Durga Bahadur Darji, Rankhupiple and Bhagawati VDCs have been declared untouchability-free zones to root out the racial discrimination in line with the letter and spirit of the Interim Constitution of Nepal, which has envisioned a society free of discrimination and inequality based on caste and creed.

Rankhupiple and Bhagawati VDCs are home to around 4,000 Dalit people.

At the programme organised to declare the VDCs untouchability-free, both Dalit and non-Dalits dined together. District-level leaders of various political parties took the occasion to express commitment to do their bit to translate the declaration's pledge into action.

Change has to come from within the Dalits, said social worker Devendra Malla of Bhagawati VDC, adding, "The entry of Dalits into the house of non-Dalits alone cannot eliminate untouchability from the society."

Nilkhantha Subedi, head teacher of Gyanodaya Secondary School, said such programme can help abolish the wrong system that has already been abolished legally by the government."

The implementation of the declaration completely depends on the Dalits themselves as they have to go through behavioural changes," said Subedi.

Bimala Pariyar of Piple -6 said declaration of untouchability-free VDCs can help Dalits in their daily activities. She maintained that untouchability cannot be alleviated just by allowing the Dalits to enter the houses of non-Dalits. Dalits should be allowed to enter public places and engage in social service, adds Bimala.

Myagdi Assistant CDO Bhim Prasad Tiwari stressed the need for elimination of the social evil. "I am sensitive towards the problems of the Dalits and pledge to provide justice to anyone who is made victim of untouchability."

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