

## Ms. Sunita Danuwar of Nepal

Ms. Sunita Danuwar, a leading social activist in Nepal, was once a victim of human trafficking. Yet, she turns her mischiefs into strong advocates for girls suffering the same fate. She is the founding member and current president of Shakti Samuha, the first non-governmental organization sheltering survivors from human trafficking in Nepal. Instead of being as a victim, Ms. Danuwar chooses to tell her story with incredible brevity to raise awareness on human trafficking prevention. She became the leader of Shakti Samuha in 2000 and assisted the Shakti Samuha won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2013.

In 1995, when Ms. Danuwar was 14-year-old, she experienced a harsh turn in her life as she was enslaved to a brothel in India. In February, the next year, Mumbai police raided the red light areas under huge pressure from domestic and international human rights organizations to save minors under 18 years old from forced sex-slavery. Almost 500 girls and women were rescued from the brothel and nearly 200 of who were Nepali girls and women including Sunita. However, being rescued did not mean that they could live with peace of mind ever after as life in shelter homes was difficult. Nearly 100 girls and women were kept in one room without any bed and without proper food and sanitization. Worst still, the Nepali government denied them from returning home for the fear of these victims might carry HIV. It took additional seven months for these Nepali girls and women to finally return Kathmandu, Nepal.

With support of NGO called WOREC Nepal, Ms. Danuwar and her friends attended a training session and realized they should not feel guilty and were not responsible for what happened to them. Ms. Danuwar and other fourteen girls organized and formed a group called Shakti Samuha in 1996, which means "the power group" in English, to rescue female victims from human trafficking and advocate on the prevention through that organization. The Shakti Samuha became the first registered organization established by survivors of human trafficking in 2000. During the initial period of organization, Ms. Danuwar worked with other NGOs to survive financially and she also worked voluntarily for the Shakti Samuha. She became president of Shakti Samuha from 2000 to 2004 and serves as the current president again from 2011.

Her role in the Shakti Samuha is not confined in one but multi-dimensional. She has been a coordinator, program director, counselor, and trainer. She is a

counselor for the rescued girls and women; a teacher to teach and also empower them. She has deeply devoted herself to the functioning of Shakti Samuha in the making of policy, planning strategy, strategic development, and training programs. One of the very inspiring roles of hers was to bring awareness of antihuman trafficking by drama performance on streets of city and in rural areas.

Thanks to the efforts of Ms. Danuwar and her colleagues in Shakti Samuha, thousands of girls and women have been saved and reintegrated into society. Since 1996, they have been organizing and empowering returning trafficking survivors by providing shelter, legal aid, counseling and vocational training for jobs like barista, seamstress, or beautician. There are Women Protection Committees established in 11 districts of Nepal in order to prevent trafficking and violence against women as well as the Adolescent Girls Groups based in the poorest communities in order to pass on the message about the dangers of trafficking. Now this organization is reaching out to rural districts where trafficking is prevalent, helping to keep women safe and make a united stand against the traffickers.