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OHCHR-Nepal calls for calm, dialogue and full respect for human rights in Terai

OHCHR-Nepal is deeply concerned about escalating tension and violence in the Terai. Since violence flared in Nepalgunj in late December, at least seven people have lost their lives, six of them in the past week, and scores have been injured, including several police. OHCHR-Nepal believes the current tensions, and the lack of dialogue present a grave risk to human rights. It calls on all parties for calm and restraint and to establish a dialogue as a matter of urgency to address underlying issues.

OHCHR-Nepal currently has mobile monitoring teams in Lahan and Janakpur where tensions have been particularly high today. The teams are in regular contact with protest organizers, authorities and members of the police to seek assurances that only peaceful means of protest will be used by demonstrators and that any force used by police is proportional to the level of threat.

OHCHR-Nepal calls on demonstration organizers, and all parties and people joining demonstrations, to exercise restraint. It calls for an end to blocking of ambulances and health personnel, and respect for Red Cross and other health workers as well as all human rights monitors and defenders.

Restoring law and order is essential to bring about calm and must be done with full respect for human rights. OHCHR-Nepal recognizes the very difficult situation faced by police, but calls on police to fulfill their responsibility to maintain law and order, using only the minimum necessary force in their duties. In particular, live ammunition must not be used in policing demonstrations unless there is a very serious threat to life and only once all other methods have been exhausted.

OHCHR-Nepal believes that there must be prompt and credible investigations into all killings and injuries which have occurred to determine those responsible. It has noted that a high level probe committee has reportedly been set up by the Government to investigate last week's killings in Lahan but that it has yet to travel to the area. It is essential that those responsible for the violence should also be held fully accountable in accordance with the law, whether it be security forces, CPN-Maoist cadres or demonstrators. The State has a particular responsibility that its security forces are held directly accountable if found to have committed violations.

In order to defuse tensions and find a way to a peaceful resolution of complex and important issues, and so guarantee an end to violence and protection of human rights, OHCHR-Nepal is convinced that it is essential for Government, community and political leaders to initiate dialogue at both the local and national levels. In particular, OHCHR-Nepal urges national political leaders to act as a matter of urgency to give a clear signal to the Madhesi communities in the Terai that they are working to address their concerns.

“We are seeing a very worrying escalation of tension and violence in communities in the Terai. We have already seen deaths and injuries, some caused by the police. Unless effective action, including dialogue, is taken by all concerned, OHCHR-Nepal fears that neither demonstration organizers nor police at the local level will be able to prevent violence and guarantee the protection of human rights, with potentially grave consequences. While political leaders have suggested dialogue and there has been conditional acceptance by community representatives, it is essential that all parties come together without further delay in order to restore calm and end the violence,” said Lena Sundh, Representative in Nepal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.