



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL



Press Release – 24 March 2008

Mass arrests in Kathmandu violate rights to peaceful protests

OHCHR-Nepal is deeply concerned at the arbitrary arrests and detentions of several hundred individuals recently in Kathmandu including reportedly 475 on 24 March by the Nepal Police (NP). The individuals appear to have been arrested on the grounds that they were participating or planning to participate in protests related to incidents in Lhasa. OHCHR has also been informed that among the individuals arrested were a number of prominent Nepali human rights defenders. These actions by police violate individuals' basic rights to freedom from arbitrary detention and freedom of movement, in addition to impairing the individuals' rights to peaceful assembly and expression.

As outlined in its press release of 17 March, OHCHR-Nepal emphasizes the right of all persons to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression. Nepal has international law obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to uphold these rights. While it is permissible to limit these rights where necessary to protect such interests as public order, a Government cannot suppress demonstrations merely on the basis of disagreement with the political opinions expressed. Authorities must ensure that they act only in the circumstances authorized under international and Nepali law.

OHCHR-Nepal is also concerned by reports that some persons have been arrested in the streets of Kathmandu on the basis of their appearance and on the assumption that they hold certain political opinions and might participate in protests. "Such arrests constitute a form of unlawful discrimination. Moreover, the practice of widespread arrests without charges is against the spirit of a democratic society governed by human rights and the rule of law", stated Richard Bennett, the Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal.

OHCHR-Nepal has communicated its concerns to authorities about attempts to stop peaceful protests and the widespread arrests and detention of persons believed to be associated with these protests. It will continue to monitor events closely and urges the government to respect the human rights of all persons within its territory.