

Opening the door to equal justice for *Dalits* in Nepal: OHCHR-Nepal disseminates its report

KATHMANDU, 14 December 2011 – The United Nations Human Rights Office in Nepal (OHCHR-Nepal) today organized a regional symposium on access to justice for victims of caste-based discrimination. Challenges, lessons learned and good practices from Nepal were shared with participants from the country and other South Asian nations. The Office's report - *Opening the Doors to Equality: Access to Justice for Dalits in Nepal* - served as the basis for the discussion.¹

The report recognizes progress made by Nepal in combating caste-based discrimination, including the commitments made during its first UPR review earlier this year, the adoption of the Untouchability Act in May 2011 and a number of judicial decisions sentencing perpetrators of caste based discrimination and untouchability to imprisonment. It also acknowledges the critical contributions made by national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to end this serious violation of human rights and national and international law.

At the same time, the report identifies the challenges and obstacles that continue to prevent victims from accessing the justice system. These include the low levels of awareness that caste-based discrimination is a crime; lack of appropriate support from law enforcement agencies; and the social and economic factors that further hinder progress, such as poverty.

The report presents findings in relation to cases investigated by the Office over the past five years, primarily in the Far Western region of Nepal and offers recommendations to various actors to combat caste-based discrimination and untouchability, including the Government, the police, NHRIs and civil society organisations.

"Recently, Nepal has taken significant steps forward in combating caste-based discrimination, including the passage of the Untouchability Act criminalizing the practice in both public and private places," said Jyoti Sanghera, Head of OHCHR-Nepal, adding "now is the time to ensure the effective implementation of the Act, to open the door to justice for those who suffer from caste discrimination every day. This will not only address one of the root causes of the conflict but also further consolidate the peace process."

"The national campaign and launch of the OHCHR report is also important for the region, since it engages many participants from neighbouring countries, where caste-based discrimination is an equally important challenge," remarked Marcia V. J. Kran, Director, Research and Right to Development Division, OHCHR, adding, "The end of this campaign will be the beginning of a next step, a new phase in which we hope our national partners will be able to consider the gaps and recommendations highlighted in the OHCHR report."

¹ The report was launched through the OHCHR-Nepal website on 7 December 2011. It can be downloaded from <http://nepal.ohchr.org/en/Reports.html>

The report has been released as part of the OHCHR-Nepal and the National Dalit Commission's 100 day campaign - "I commit to end caste based discrimination and untouchability" - launched on 16 September 2011.