



**Statement by Richard Bennett  
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal  
Delivered at the Release of EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders,  
Local Implementation Strategy in Nepal**

10 October 2007

Dear Heads of EU missions, members of the media, colleagues and friends:

I am honored to have been asked to say a few words at the release today of the Local Implementation Strategy in Nepal for the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. I would like to congratulate the European Union for this initiative, which – as recent events continue to show – remains extremely necessary despite the signing of the peace agreement. I would like also to welcome the significant financial support that both the EU member states and the European Commission provide to human rights defenders and, equally, to OHCHR.

Nepal's human rights defenders will remain key to the establishment of an environment where respect for human rights is a reality. They will continue fighting for human rights when international organizations like OHCHR-Nepal no longer have such a major presence in this country. As the EU implementation strategy states, Nepalese human rights defenders who will be most at risk are those working on sensitive issues such as disappearances or impunity, and this risk is compounded for those who are victims or women or youths, who work in remote areas, or who represent other marginalized groups.

Who are the human rights defenders? They are, of course, members of human rights NGOs, who Nepalese have grown used to seeing dressed in blue vests monitoring demonstrations. But they can also be women and men who work as teachers, civil servants or are students. Journalists can play the role of human rights defenders and, I am sad to say, in recent weeks journalists have been prohibited from exercising their right to freedom of expression by those who have no respect for this right, believing that it should apply only when it is used to portray them in a positive light, never in a negative one. Three journalists have been kidnapped in the past week and one, Birendra Sah, is yet to be released.

In a meeting with member organizations of Human Rights Home a couple of weeks ago, I reassured human rights defenders that OHCHR-Nepal will continue to do its utmost to ensure that they are protected in the course of their work. The EU's local implementation strategy for its guidelines on human rights defenders being released today is another important contribution towards providing that protection.

Thank you