



**Statement by Richard Bennett  
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal  
Delivered at the NHRC Program to mark Human Rights Day  
10 December 2007, Kathmandu**

Rt Honorable Prime Minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, Hon Chairman of the NHRC Kedar Nath Upadhyay, SRSG Ian Martin, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends:

Firstly, I would like to wish everyone a peaceful Human Rights Day. I also take this opportunity to thank the NHRC for organizing this event and to publicly congratulate the Prime Minister for appointing a few months ago new Commissioners, who are reinvigorating Nepal's national human rights institution.

This year's Human Rights Day marks the launch of a year long campaign leading to the 60th<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The theme of the campaign and that for today is *Dignity and Justice for all of us*.

Every year, 10<sup>th</sup> December is a day to celebrate human rights accomplishments and to contemplate the challenges that lie ahead. (**One of the challenges being to eliminate violence against women – it's no coincidence that the annual 16 days campaign of activism on this issue culminates on Human Rights Day**). As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said in his statement today, Human Rights Day reminds us that in a world then reeling from the horrors of the Second World War, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the first global statement of what we now take for granted – the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings. Translated into more than 360 languages, the Declaration has inspired the constitutions of both newly independent States and new democracies.

Nepal is one of those countries emerging from conflict and in transition to democracy that has proclaimed its commitment to human rights through, for instance, international treaties ratified, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and provisions in the Interim Constitution. However, converting these commitments into realities for the people of Nepal is a formidable task requiring a great deal of determination and persistence.

My office, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, is pleased to be here to support all our partners in Nepal in this endeavor. We appreciate that this year the Government of Nepal and the CPN-M have extended the Agreement mandating OHCHR to monitor and report on the human rights situation, as well as to advise the authorities on the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and other measures for the promotion and protection of human rights in Nepal. We are also mandated, amongst other things, to provide advisory services and support to the National Human Rights Commission, representatives of civil society, human rights NGOs and individuals. I assure you that we will continue to do our utmost to fulfill these responsibilities.

Creating the possibility for everyone to live in dignity and with justice requires Nepal, like many other countries, to tackle impunity, discrimination and social exclusion. As UN Special Procedures mandate holders have stated today, “the connection between long-term discrimination and exclusion to tensions, instability and conflict is now well established, but must be more widely understood. Recognition at the highest level that discrimination exists and the political will to confront it are vital first steps towards its elimination. States, with civil society partners, must take the lead in promoting non-discrimination and equality in wider society, and be proactive in efforts to encourage social cohesion and inclusion, including through education and the media.”

In the case of Nepal, combating problems with public security, especially in the Tarai, the lack of accountability for **past and continuing human rights violations** and continuing inequalities affecting marginalized groups and women require intensified efforts. OHCHR-Nepal is under no illusion that these challenges will be surmounted overnight. A climate of impunity can only be erased with major, long-term efforts at many levels, as is the case when addressing decades of discriminatory practices. A concerted effort by the government, political parties, **including the CPN-M**, and civil society is required. In this context I would like to pay tribute to those who over the past year have continued with courage, determination and no mean skill to promote and protect human rights, including members of the women's movement, groups working for the rights of ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, disabled persons, sexual minorities, other socially marginalized groups, and of course the human rights defenders organizations. I would like to encourage all of these groups to continue approaching OHCHR-Nepal for support and collaboration.

I would like to conclude my remarks by quoting from the Human Rights Day statement of Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights: “In the course of this year, unprecedented efforts must be made to ensure that every person in the world can rely on just laws for his or her protection. In advancing all human rights for all, we will move towards the greatest fulfilment of human potential, a promise which is at the heart of the Universal Declaration.”

Thank you.