



**Statement by Richard Bennett**  
**Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal**  
***Delivered at the Programme on Creating a Common Programme***  
***for the South Asian World Dignity Forum Process and the Dalit Agenda in SAARC***  
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Honourable Finance Minister Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, Ashok Bharti, World Dignity Forum (WDF) Founder, New Delhi, Motilal Nepali, WDF South Asia Convener, distinguished panelists, participants, members of the media, and friends:

I would first like to thank the organizer, the South Asian Convener of the World Dignity Forum, for inviting me to speak today. I applaud your strategy of assembling various organizations working on Dalit issues in order to build a common regional agenda: there is strength in numbers. Today is Democracy Day in Nepal; democracy and human rights are based on equality, non-discrimination and the inherent dignity of every human being.

While your scope is regional, the issues that you are working on are particularly pertinent in Nepal today. Since the People's Movement of 2006, marginalization of various communities, including Dalits, has become a matter of public debate. Some steps have been taken to correct this situation, including the Legislature's declaration of the elimination of untouchability in 2006 and a quota for Dalits and other marginalized communities in the proportional representation section of the Constituent Assembly election.

However, these measures are insufficient, and OHCHR-Nepal continues to work with its national and international partners, including the NHRC, for an end to discrimination. This includes, *inter alia*, the upcoming publication of a report examining access to justice for Dalits, and women; monitoring cases filed in Nepal's justice system that challenge practices violating laws against discrimination, and; raising awareness of the right to non-discrimination, a right celebrated notably on 21 March, the International Day for the Elimination of Discrimination.

While some challenges to the Dalit agenda in Nepal are linked to current political developments, there are many other challenges that are common to all of you working on these issues throughout South Asia. In their Final Report, the UN Special Rapporteurs on the topic of discrimination based on work and descent conclude that South Asian states have taken steps to eliminate discrimination but that it persists because these steps have not been “seriously, vigorously and effectively carried out”; they are often “incomplete or insufficient”, or; because “discrimination of this kind is deeply rooted in social customs, beliefs, rituals and behaviour”.

The special rapporteurs also present a revised *Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent*, and urge that this be adopted by the Human Rights Council and forwarded to the General Assembly for adoption. Pending that adoption, Member States should give due consideration to the *Draft Principles and Guidelines* in formulating policies, and all organizations, national and international, should give full consideration to the *Draft Principles and Guidelines* in the course of their activities.

These Guidelines, I would suggest, can be an important tool in your advocacy to see issues of caste-based discrimination placed on the agendas of South Asian governments and to raise awareness among the general public. I pledge that my Office will continue to highlight and address issues of caste-based discrimination in Nepal, and offer you my heartiest wishes for the success of your deliberations here today.

Thank you.