

Check against delivery



Talking points for Richard Bennett
Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
Delivered at the Release of OHCHR's *Handbook for Civil Society*
10 June 2009, Kathmandu

- Thank you for being here today. We organised this programme to present and discuss a number of OHCHR initiatives of interest to, and in partnership with, civil society, including a handbook on working with the UN human rights programme, an information leaflet on how to submit a First Information Report to the police, and information about an upcoming fund to award grants to civil society organisations and national human rights institutions to implement projects on transitional justice.
- The handbook is a global publication produced by OHCHR Geneva. My colleague Sudha will shortly give a brief overview of it. Another colleague, Dip, will present the FIR comic book prepared by our ESCR team here in Nepal. I hope that the handbook and the FIR comic will prove to be very useful tools to help civil society in Nepal understand, access and use the national and international human rights mechanisms. We are in the process of translating the entire handbook into Nepali and will make this available in the autumn. However, today we are able to provide you all with copies of the handbook in English and with initial translations of two of the key chapters of the handbook in Nepali. One is the chapter on Funds and Grants available to civil society and the other is on the Universal Periodic Review which is of particular interest now given that Nepal will undergo the UPR process in early 2011 and as a result preparations for that process must begin very soon. Civil Society's role in the UPR process will of course be crucial and OHCHR looks forward to working closely with our civil society partners in these efforts. The FIR, as you will see, is in Nepali. An English presentation is also available in the form of a hand-out.
- OHCHR-Nepal is also looking forward to working closely with civil society, the NHRC and the other national human rights institutions, the National Women's Commission, National Dalit Commission and the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, in relation to a \$300,000 grant fund that is one component of the OHCHR Transitional Justice Project funded from the UN Peace Fund. Andrew will give you further details later, but I would like to say that this fund is one way to ensure that civil society is able to actively participate in the TJ process. In addition, there will be an opportunity for smaller victims groups working at the local level to implement targeted projects in support of effective TJ. We are currently awaiting the release of funds within the UN system but very much hope that the project can be launched by August.
- OHCHR is following closely political developments in Nepal and any impact that they have on the peace process. As the High Commissioner said in her speech to the Human Rights Council last week, OHCHR-Nepal staff have a role to play during this sensitive phase, by monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions, as well as in supporting the Government, national institutions, and civil society in their efforts to protect human rights.
- As you have probably heard, the Government has responded to the HC's request by extending OHCHR-Nepal's agreement for 3 months for the time being. I would like to clarify that the Government has confirmed that this is an interim measure, which will allow it to hold further consultations before it decides on the request for a longer renewal of the agreement.

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- During this period, OHCHR will continue to undertake the monitoring necessary, including advocacy and intervention with authorities, in accordance with our mandate and as required by the circumstances on the ground. Our recent efforts in Ramechhap, in partnership with the NHRC, over the past few weeks highlight this.
- I have been very gratified to receive so much support from our friends and partners in the civil society in Nepal for our continued presence here. We are, of course, well aware of your initiative in bringing us to Nepal in 2005. Our continued collaboration in these human rights endeavours until the peace process is successfully concluded remains vital to the future of Nepal.
- As you know, OHCHR and the NHRC agreed to formulate *Guidelines for Cooperation* in February this year. The guidelines are part of a process whereby OHCHR will actively support and work with the NHRC to improve human rights protection – and assist the NHRC to enhance its capacity to provide that protection. This process of strengthening capacities of our partners also includes other NHRIs and civil society. OHCHR is not stepping back from monitoring and protecting human rights but we are committed to working to ensure that when we do eventually leave, the NHRC is fully able to take the lead in this human rights protection role together with other human rights defenders.
- The Office remains actively engaged in supporting the development of civil society networks at the district level across the country including, for example, the Women Human Rights Defenders network in Kaski and the new Accountability Watch Committee in Kapilvastu. Furthermore, we will continue to work with the EU Working Group on human rights defenders, of which many of you are members, to ensure that effective protection mechanisms are created for HRDs.
- We will also work actively to assist our partners in the other national human rights institutions to effectively implement their specific mandates, including through our efforts to develop their investigating and monitoring capacities. For example, OHCHR will be supporting both the women's and Dalit commissions with trainings and there will be a 2-day human rights orientation for the women's commission at the end of this month.
- I look forward to speaking with you in person at the end of today's programme when drinks and snacks will be served. Now I will hand over to my colleague Sudha Uprety who will provide a short presentation on the contents of the Handbook.

Thank you.

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