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FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL



Statement to the Press

OHCHR concerned about current human rights situation in the context of the ongoing *bandh* and political stalemate

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Good evening and welcome to this press meet. I am here to brief you on OHCHR-Nepal's growing concerns about the impact of the continuing political stalemate and the ongoing indefinite *bandh* on the human rights situation in the country - in the Kathmandu Valley and in the districts. As of today, we have all experienced a full week of being suspended in this situation to which no resolution is clearly visible.

OHCHR-Nepal is deeply concerned about the increasing levels of violence and intimidation in the past couple of days of the *bandh*. Our human rights monitors, deployed throughout the country, are reporting rising tensions culminating in clashes in several districts and in the capital.

While upholding the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of opinion and expression, OHCHR opposes the coercive enforcement of the *bandh*, including threats, psychological terror, intimidation and any other violent measure. An extended *bandh* inevitably results in the curtailment of rights and freedoms including the freedom of movement and rights to health, education and work. The impact of this *bandh* has been felt particularly harshly by the poor and disadvantaged sections of society.

In Kathmandu, our monitors have witnessed frustrations growing in many areas, and confrontations between demonstrators and the local population, and with cadres of other political parties - including in Jorpati, Budhanilkantha, and Kalanki. This trend has continued today with clashes between UCPN-M demonstrators and persons participating in mass rallies. OHCHR condemns the violent retaliation by UCPN-M cadres of persons they have alleged to be 'infiltrators' provoking the crowd.

Violent confrontations have also taken place in numerous places across the country including in Parsa and Bara (Central Region), Pokhara and Parbat (Western Region), Humla (Mid-Western Region) and Okhaldhunga, Dhankuta and Saptari in the Eastern Region. Curfews have been imposed in at least three districts. A very serious incident took place in Birgunj on 6 May in which the security forces used excessive force against demonstrators, injuring more than 50 people.

OHCHR has deployed 21 monitoring teams in the main flash-point areas across the country including all development regions. These teams are monitoring the overall human rights situation, liaising with local human rights defenders, the NHRC, the security forces and demonstration organisers, as well as intervening where necessary in an attempt to prevent violent incidents. As the *bandh* continues and tensions escalate, OHCHR monitors on the ground are urging all parties to exercise maximum restraint.

With the concerning exception of the incident in Birgunj, OHCHR's monitoring has indicated that the security forces have been acting in a professional manner, particularly in Kathmandu. I would like to emphasise the positive role that the security forces can play in further defusing tensions and helping to prevent confrontations. While carrying out their obligations to protect citizens from acts of violence and intimidation, the security forces remain bound by their obligations to act with proportionality and to refrain from using excessive force.

During the earlier phase of the *bandh*, OHCHR noted the restraint and discipline exercised by demonstrators. However, the recent reports of violent incidents are extremely worrying, as is the increase in the carrying of weapons such as *laathis* and metal bars. This must cease. I appeal to all parties to demonstrate the same degree of peaceful conduct and restraint as observed during the earlier days of the *bandh*.

The move on the part of the organizers of the *bandh* to enable the availability of essential food items in Kathmandu is encouraging. OHCHR urges the *bandh* organizers to ensure that local residents are allowed to exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms and have access to essential goods and services. OHCHR also strongly urges the protest organizers to do everything in their power to ensure that children are not utilized or manipulated for political purposes.

For close to a year now, OHCHR has been stressing the need for significant steps to be taken by all political parties to address the country's political problems consistent with the spirit of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and to take every possible measure to avoid violence, and to avert a human rights crisis. OHCHR strongly urges the political parties to take urgent steps to resolve their differences and end this debilitating political impasse bearing in mind the "best interest" of all of the people of Nepal.