



***Joint Statement By:
UNICEF and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights***

“Protect the Rights of Children”

Kathmandu, 5 May: The United Nations' Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (OHCHR-Nepal) are increasingly concerned about the use of children in demonstrations by the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) which places them at risk of violence and exposes them to potentially dangerous situations.

There are alarming and confirmed reports of large numbers of children present in demonstrations and in some cases actively participating in the enforcement of the bandh. UNICEF and OHCHR urge all parties to respect the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Nepal is a signatory, and to take all necessary measures to avoid exposing all boys and girls under the age of eighteen to risk of harm. People under eighteen must not be forced, coerced or bribed into participating in political activities. Children should not carry weapons that can inflict bodily harm under any circumstances.

The forced closure of schools during bandhs is a violation of children's rights to education. There are incidents of schools being occupied and of classes being disrupted and exams prevented from taking place. UNICEF and OHCHR would like to reiterate earlier statements that it is unacceptable that children in Nepal are being prevented from attending school due to the imposition of *bandhs*. All schools should remain open during *bandhs* and the safety of children assured so that their education is not interrupted.

Nepal has made significant great progress towards achieving universal education for all with a net enrolment rate of 93%. Now is a very crucial period for school enrolment, with the opening of the new school year. 'Welcome to School' campaigns have been planned throughout Nepal in an effort to enroll all children, in particular those who are out of school. The majority of those children not attending schools are from disadvantaged and marginalized communities and the closure of schools at this vital period is a setback for these children and a missed opportunity to achieve their right to education.

UNICEF and OHCHR call for all political parties to live up to their commitments and duties to protect the rights of children, including the right to education.

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