



Statement by Gillian Kitley
Acting Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
At the Conference, *Voices of Victims: Hearing and Caring*
27 December 2007, Kathmandu

Honorable Chairman of the NHRC, Mr. Kedar Nath Upadhyay; Honorable Madam Deputy Speaker, Chitra Lekha Yadav; Distinguished Guests, Colleagues and Friends:

Firstly, I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak here at this innovative and timely event, in place of OHCHR Representative Richard Bennett, who is out of the country

The testimonies and experiences of victims and their families are central to the work of we in the human rights community. They form the substance on which our reports and analysis are based and our strategies to combat impunity and improve human rights protection will not be successful if we do not listen to and include the victims, but it is seldom that we devote entire programs to listening to what the victims have to say. In that respect, I would like to thank INHURED International and Population Watch for having arranged the program that you will be following during the next two days.

The sessions that you will participate in – Discrimination, Gender Injustice, Forced Migration and Structural Violence – are all linked in important ways: the individuals you will hear from have all experienced human rights violations or abuses, and, in almost all of the cases, no one has been held accountable; there has been no justice or compensation. In that sense, I believe that this conference can produce important results. By raising their voices in this forum, the survivors can make their situations known in a very personal way and increase pressure on those in positions of authority to respond to meet their human rights obligations. Another important outcome would be to strengthen the position of those organisations, including OHCHR-Nepal, who are calling for a victim-centred approach to all transitional justice mechanisms that will be established in this post-conflict period in Nepal.

The issue of disappearances is very much in the media recently, and it is altogether appropriate that it be addressed in one of the sessions here. At the same time, I am happy to see that discussion of long-term discrimination and marginalization will also be included. It is essential that these deeply-rooted human rights violations be addressed in this post-conflict phase so that the roots of lasting peace can be established in Nepal.

In closing, I would like to salute the survivors of human rights violations and abuses who have offered to share their experiences – and in many cases their pain – over the next two days in order that the future Nepal will be a country where such acts will never be repeated. Your bravery will be noted and greatly appreciated by those of us who share such a vision for the future.

Thank you.