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OHCHR-Nepal UNICEF-Nepal Joint Press Release

On the occasion of the 17th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child

Kathmandu, 19th Nov 2006: OHCHR and UNICEF in Nepal appeal for the Government and CPN-Maoist to place the rights and wellbeing of children among their key priorities in the implementation of the peace process. On the eve of an historic peace agreement, there is an opportunity to restore the rights of children who have suffered greatly during the long conflict, and to ensure that future generations of Nepali children can grow and thrive in lasting peace.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, which was adopted 17 years ago on 20th November, states that anyone below 18 years of age is a child and has the right to special care and protection.

OHCHR and UNICEF are working with the Government, the CPN-Maoist, child protection and youth organisations to ensure that the special needs of children are addressed in Nepal.

"Protecting and restoring the rights of children is an enormous challenge," said Dr Suomi Sakai, UNICEF's Representative in Nepal. "The conflict has taken a great toll on the children in the country. Their childhood has been snatched from them. Their education has been disrupted and they have been torn apart from families. Even today, when there has been a cessation of conflict, children have not returned home and continue to be active in the CPN-Maoist armed groups. Even today children continue to be killed and maimed from the explosive remnants of war."

"Children in Nepal have been among the thousands forced from their homes, displaced by the conflict," added Lena Sundh, Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal. "Boys and girls have been detained and tortured, and even killed. They have been traumatised by being caught in the cross-fire of violent conflict. Social and economic rights essential to the development of children have been greatly set back, as grinding poverty affecting millions of children has been exacerbated by the long conflict."

OHCHR and UNICEF in Nepal remain greatly concerned that even now children under 18 are still being recruited, voluntarily or forcibly, by the CPN-Maoist, in violation of international standards and their own commitments.

Over the coming days, the parties will be signing a comprehensive peace agreement. OHCHR and UNICEF in Nepal urge the parties to

- Ensure that there is no recruitment of children under the age of 18 into armed groups.
- Facilitate the return and reintegration of such children through immediate and concrete collaborations between the CPN-Maoist, the Government and organisations and agencies working in the field of child protection and human rights.

- Take immediate steps to identify children under the age of 18 currently in armed groups, and to make provisions for returning them back to their families and communities.
- Ensure that those responsible for serious human rights violations against children are punished.
- Guarantee that schools are respected as places of teaching and learning and that no political party disrupts the education of children through political activities.
- Pay special attention to the needs of girls, as well as disabled and disadvantaged children, affected by the conflict.

“In the coming months, programmes for rehabilitation and recovery from conflict need to be urgently put in place. It is essential that such programmes give special priority to children's right to education, health, nutrition and protection as stipulated in the CRC,” said Dr Sakai.

Nothing could be a greater sign of the benefits of peace than Nepali children living in an environment free of violence, intimidation, fear and insecurity.

For further information contact

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