



**Statement by Lena Sundh, Representative of the United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal**

**Delivered at a Ceremony to Mark *World Press Freedom Day*,
Organized by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, 3 May 2007**

Dear Friends,

I am honoured to be invited here today to celebrate the achievements of Nepalese journalists and to pay tribute to those among them who were killed during the conflict. It is appropriate, yet nonetheless disturbing, that we gather to remember them on a day marked worldwide as Press Freedom Day.

Although the conflict has ended and we have seen significant improvement in the respect for human rights, journalists' right to freedom of expression remains under threat in Nepal. Some examples – on 29 April, a socket bomb was tossed at a van that was carrying six journalists in Morang. No one was hurt, and the Madheshi Tigers said in a press release that they didn't know the van was carrying journalists, but nevertheless it shows the dangers that journalists are exposed to. Also in April, reporters from Image Channel Television, Image FM and other outlets were threatened because of their news coverage, according to the FNJ; and earlier this year, activists in the Terai blocked the distribution of *Gorkhapatra* and *Kantipur* newspapers, accusing them of not giving their concerns sufficient coverage.

During the Terai protests, journalists were threatened and reportedly beaten by demonstrators as they attempted to gather news. OHCHR-Nepal spoke out, urging protesters to allow the media to carry out its important task of informing the public. We also reminded the Government that it has an obligation to ensure that journalists are able to continue their professional activities without obstacles.

On a more positive note, the media business in Nepal appears to be booming. We are seeing new publications almost every month; dozens of would-be FM radio stations have obtained licenses since the *Jana Andolan* and new television stations are set to begin broadcasting any time.

These developments, of course, carry their own challenges, among them – who will staff these news outlets? What sort of training will the junior reporters get before being sent out into this politically charged phase of Nepal's history? And will these new members of the country's media community make efforts to mirror the inclusiveness that has been promised but is still seen by Nepal's marginalized groups as frustratingly out of reach?

And, while we're on the topic, will the new media, along with established outlets, be willing to devote the time and resources to delve into those frustrations – to tell the stories of those Nepalese who have been kept on the 'outside' for so many generations that they feel that they have no option but to take part in protests?

Equally important, will these journalists look beyond the sloganeering of political parties and themselves scrutinize head-on such essential human rights issues as "inclusiveness" and "proportional representation", and then take pains to lay out their findings responsibly and in such a way that the average reader, viewer or listener will understand?

In short, the media will once again be expected to 'deliver the goods' during this sensitive post-conflict phase of the country's life, just as the public turned to newspapers, television, radio – and increasingly the Internet – during both the conflict and the *Jana Andolan* in order to learn about events and to try to understand why this country was being turned upside-down.

It is a huge challenge, and responsibility, for both the new and seasoned media. However, the responsibility is not yours alone. It is essential that the government and political parties of all persuasions re-commit themselves to defending fundamental human rights like the right to information and to freedom of expression. As the Nepalese people continue to strengthen their fledgling democracy, the need will grow for lively public debate in which it is possible to challenge, peacefully, the views of others. The media must be free to deliver, stimulate and, at times, lead this debate without fear of its rights being violated.

We at OHCHR-Nepal will continue to do our utmost to see that you, the media, can fulfil the expectations that have been placed upon your shoulders – and with the hope that you will never again have to publish a book that celebrates the lives and work of journalists who were killed in the line of duty.

Thank you