



**Remarks by Richard Bennett**  
**Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal**  
**At a Programme to Mark International Women's Day (8 March)**  
7 March 2009, Nachghar, Kathmandu

Hon. Prime Minister Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal; Hon members of the Constituent Assembly, Ms. Gayatri Shah and Ms. Sapana Pradhan Malla; Ms. Nainkala Thapa, President, National Women's Commission; Ms. Brinda Hada, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare; members of the UN Family; of the media; colleagues, and friends:

I am proud to be here today, on behalf of the United Nations in Nepal, to celebrate International Women's Day, and to celebrate women, irrespective of their nationality, ethnicity, language and cultural, economic or political background.

This year's theme for the Day is *Women and Men Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls*. This issue is, of course, one that plagues all societies, be they in the north or south, be they rich or poor. So, on March 8 all of us who have made a personal commitment to see violence against women and girls ended, are asked to wear a white ribbon to symbolize our pledge.

Women and girls in Nepal as elsewhere have the right to be empowered and to live in dignity and self esteem. Only when women have equality will violence against women and girls be eradicated and only then can a truly new Nepal be realized. Together, Nepali women and men must fight to remove social barriers that keep gender violence hidden, smothering the lives and aspirations of girls and women. This issue must be scrutinized in the light of day so that changes can be made to policy, laws and the administration of justice.

This reform will not be easy, and it will not be quick. And it will require the support of all of us in the international community. For example, my Office, the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, has been researching access to justice for women from marginalized communities. The barriers to these women receiving justice are many, and include: the social stigma attached to women who report themselves as victims; the reluctance, and even refusal, of some Nepal Police to file FIRs, and the 35-day statute of limitation on filing rape charges.

By ratifying CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, nations – including Nepal – have pledged to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws, and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women; to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women.

Last year's election of a Constituent Assembly, one-third of whose members are women, is an important step towards realizing these pledges; repealing the dozens of national laws that discriminate against women will be another; and of course it is essential that the new Constitution guarantees that the rights of all Nepali women will be fully respected equally with those of men. Here I would like to stress that empowering women so that their equality is respected does not signify a loss of rights for men. Women and men are partners in society. When one of us is strengthened we all become stronger and more able to face the formidable challenges ahead. For its part, the United Nations has a duty to ensure that the special needs of girls and women are met in all of its activities during the peace process.

We also express our commitment to continue the campaign **UNiTE to end Violence Against Women** launched by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in February last year. Its objective is to raise public awareness and increase political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and

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girls – in all parts of the world. The **UNiTE** campaign will continue until 2015 to coincide with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally, let's not forget that March 8 is a day also to **celebrate** women. This will be happening -- in fact is already happening – in many programmes in Kathmandu and throughout the country, organised by the National Women's Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, I/NGOs and other civil society organisations.

On behalf of the UN Country Team, I would like to congratulate the National Women's Commission for organising today's event and the mass rally tomorrow. The Commission has a key role to play in promoting the rights of all Nepali women and we look forward to future collaboration in these endeavours. OHCHR-Nepal will actively support the capacity development of the institution in this regard.

Finally, I hope that all of you will also take time tomorrow to recognize the achievements of the women in your lives: perhaps yourself, a member of your family, someone you work with or someone who has worked for the success of the country, such as the women with us here today.

Thank you.

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