



**Remarks by Jyoti Sanghera
Deputy Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
At the Programme, *Status of Freedom of Expression and Opinion in Nepal*
Organised by Freedom Forum to Mark Human Rights Day
9 December 2008, Kathmandu**

Hon. Kedar Nath Upadhyay, Chief Commissioner of the NHRC; Mr. Krishna Pahadi; Mr. Tara Nath Dahal, Chairperson, Freedom Forum; Colleagues; Members of the Media; and Friends:

I am delighted to be here today on the occasion of Human Rights Day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I would like to thank Freedom Forum for your invitation. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Freedom Forum Chairperson, Taranath Dahal, for being awarded the Suryabhakta-Patanadevi Adhikari Memorial National Journalism Award-2009 for his contribution to the development of professional journalism in Nepal as well as for his activism on behalf of press freedom, freedom of expression and opinion, and democracy.

In the past six decades the UDHR has become one of the best-known expressions ever of the aspiration of humankind to live according to the universal principles of equality, fairness and justice. Article 19 is now synonymous with the right of all persons everywhere to give and receive information and opinions.

Unfortunately, the current state of freedom of expression and opinion in Nepal dampens the enthusiasm generated by the celebration of UDHR60. Freedom of the media is obviously suffering but other forms of expression are also being curtailed. For example, Freedom Forum has been closely documenting the lapses of the National Information Commission in providing information according to the Right to Information Act, including copies of reports on the killing of CPN-UML candidate Rishi Prasad Sharma in Surkhet District and the murder of seven persons in Dang in the run-up to the Constituent Assembly elections.

I was happy to see both Prime Minister Prachanda and the Information Minister, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, last week commit to the people's right to information and instruct officials to convert that pledge into reality for all individuals. The free flow of information in two directions – from the government to the people and from the grassroots to Kathmandu – will be essential in the drafting of a new Constitution that truly represents all peoples of this wonderfully diverse country, and promotes and protects their human rights on the ground.

My office, OHCHR-Nepal, has taken a small step in this regard by organising workshops for journalists on human rights and the Constitution, with particular focus on the right of all Nepalis to participate in governance. In doing so we have developed a strong relationship with the Media Centre of the CA, and will continue exploring more opportunities to strengthen this crucial link between the Assembly and the media, particularly for journalists working outside of Kathmandu. OHCHR-Nepal considers the media an essential component of the national human rights protection system that we are committed to strengthening.

As most of you here know all too well, it is the journalists in the regions – who already have to overcome challenges of lack of information and a paucity of resources – who are often the objects of attacks against the media. The recent killing of Jagat Prasad Joshi in Kailali brought that home again all too dramatically. OHCHR-Nepal urges the Government to ensure that the probe panel that was established to look into this crime complete its investigation on time and make the report public as swiftly as possible.

Of course I could go on listing recent attacks on the media in the past month, including incidents in Kathmandu. Taken collectively they demonstrate the urgency of duty bearers, above all the Government, swiftly responding to violations of freedom of expression – and all other rights violations – and holding accountable those responsible. Only then will Nepal begin to erode its culture of impunity and confidently move ahead to consolidate the remarkable changes of the past two years and establish lasting peace in the country.

Thank you.

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