



Address by Mr. Ian Martin
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights in Nepal

delivered to
Amnesty International-Nepal

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Amnesty Friends,

It is an honour to have been invited to this the 14th anniversary of Amnesty International-Nepal. I am sorry that I cannot be with you today, but I am sure you will understand that I have pressing work to do.

Fourteen years as a national organisation is evidence of the growth and maturity of AI in Nepal. In this time you have established over 70 groups across the country, demonstrating both the widespread concern for human rights in communities throughout Nepal and the skill and dedication of Amnesty members to organise and coordinate to protect human rights worldwide. AI Nepal is particularly known for the democratic nature of its own governance, and this of course is a key factor behind its organisational sustainability and success.

I know that AI Nepal has placed considerable emphasis on seeking to prevent violence against women. In Nepal, and in countries throughout the world, this remains one of the most significant human rights challenges. Human rights defenders face the task of continuing to address the long-running causes of violence against women in comparatively normal social conditions, and are faced, tragically, with seeking to protect women from an added vulnerability to violence in conflict situations throughout the world. In Nepal, you know only too well the consequences of conflict and its impact on women. Your efforts to protect women from violence need to be redoubled.

As you know I have a deep association with Amnesty International. As both Head of the Asia Pacific Region and as Secretary General of Amnesty, I took a close interest in the human rights situation in Nepal in the 1980s and 1990s. AI-Nepal was born in the heady days of democracy after the reforms of 1990, and its establishment was itself a symbol of Nepalese people's concern for the protection and promotion of human rights within Nepal and a sign that Nepali people saw themselves playing a wider role in the international community to protect human rights.

Fourteen years later, the world faces new and grave challenges to the human rights of peoples in all countries. In the so-called "war on terror" governments and citizens seek to establish security in a dangerous world. But in the name of security some seek to put aside fundamental rights, and we see actions such as arbitrary detention, torture, the so-called "rendition" of suspects to third countries, and clamping down on the democratic rights of expression and assembly. And so it remains for organisations like AI to constantly struggle to ensure that these hard-won rights are

not eroded or, worse, discarded entirely. Especially the most vulnerable people continue to need the advocacy, the urgent actions and the voice of AI.

I wish you well for your 14th Annual General Meeting - may it be a time for you all to renew the commitment and energy of AI-Nepal in its mission to protect human rights.