



**Message from Mr Ian Martin**

**Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner**

**for Human Rights in Nepal**

**For the National Conference of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists**

**1 February 2006**

Members of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, distinguished guests,

Thank you for the invitation to speak today at your conference. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person, especially as I understand that your members have traveled from many districts to join you today, to share experiences and ideas.

As you know the OHCHR is committed to the protection and promotion of all human rights for all. In Nepal, it is the serious human rights situation associated with the long-running conflict that has brought about the mandate of our office. While much of our effort is aimed at reducing violations of international humanitarian law within this armed conflict, we also seek to protect fundamental democratic rights which are challenged in the context of conflict – namely the right to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly.

Freedom of expression is obviously at the heart of your organization, and the working life of each of your members. The ability of journalists and the media to operate freely, without fear or coercion, is a critical element to freedom of expression. Citizens, organizations and institutions rely on media to have access to information and ideas. If the media is intimidated, closed down or its members targeted by either side to a

conflict because their message is not popular, then the right to freedom of expression is endangered.

In Nepal, we know that journalists and media workers continue to be subject to intimidation and harassment. In our monitoring, our office has identified this sort of targeting both by representatives of the State and by representatives of the CPN (Maoist). While we see a high degree of freedom of expression of the media in Kathmandu despite the threat of restrictions, conditions are very different in the districts. Our office has monitored situations which indicate a pattern of journalists being summoned and threatened by local administration, Police or RNA officials because their reporting is considered to be critical. Maoist cadres have also coerced journalists in the districts. In addition there been cases of arbitrary arrests of journalists, beatings of journalists while they covered the stories of demonstrations, and death threats against journalists.

Our office watches with great interest for the pending decision of the Supreme Court on the legality of the Media Ordinance promulgated in October 2005. As you know the Media Ordinance amended six separate statutes regarding media, strengthening already restrictive provisions and introducing new restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression and the right to seek and impart information. OHCHR-Nepal has expressed its concern that the restrictions violate international human rights standards and are not limited to those permitted under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The right of Nepali citizens to freely express and share ideas and information is at the heart of the democratic freedoms of your people. A media which speaks without fear or favour, and which reports responsibly, has a vital role to play in Nepal. I congratulate the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, a national professional organisation with 79 branches across the country, in your efforts to support the growth of professional media, efforts which must be sustained and redoubled.