



OHCHR-Nepal

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Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal

Address at the Third National Consultation with Women Human Rights Defenders

**Organised by WOREC and FEDO
on the occasion of International Day of Women Human Rights Defenders
28 November 2006, Kathmandu**

I am pleased and honored to be here with you today, at the opening of this very significant two-day gathering. I congratulate WOREC and FEDO for organising this event, and all the participants and your organisations for the leadership you demonstrate in your social and human rights work at the grassroots level across Nepal.

I will be brief because the real work of this Third National Consultation is for the participants, to share your ideas and develop plans for action.

Women human rights defenders have an essential leadership role to play at the community and national level in this historic transition to peace and democracy in Nepal. You may not know, so I would just like to share with you that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is a woman – Louise Arbour, an eminent Canadian judge. And the new Deputy High Commissioner is also a woman - Kyung-Wha Kang is a South Korean woman with wide diplomatic experience. Perhaps in this gathering today there sits a future UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. I hope so.

Your initiative to raise awareness of the provisions of Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council is an important contribution to the peace process in Nepal, as all actors must now implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Resolution 1325 was an historic step for the United Nations. It was passed in the year 2000, and was based on the lessons of years of terrible experience of conflict in so many countries. Resolution 1325 also represents years of struggle by women activists in countries around the world, including Nepal, to ensure that action be taken to redress the conditions that result in women and girls suffering in conflict, and to make sure that women are able to participate fully as actors, and leaders, in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

It is essential that all Nepali actors take action to put into practice the measures set out in Resolution 1325, both for the protection and promotion of the human rights of Nepali women and girls, and equally to ensure that there is increased representation of Nepali women at all decision-making levels of Nepali institutions and mechanisms involved in the implementation of the CPA. This is not a question of special rights for women. Rather it is a recognition that women and girls have the same rights as men and boys, that we are all equal and that respect for the human rights of all is essential to sustainable peace and development.

It will also be important for us, the United Nations, to make sure that we implement the measures set out in Resolution 1325 to ensure that UN assistance to the peace process takes into account the perspectives of women and girls, and that women are represented at all levels of the UN mission and offices assisting the process.

The early steps after the Jana Aandalon give us cause for concern that key Nepali actors have not yet seriously considered the lessons which Resolution 1325 is based upon. Both the Seven Party Alliance and the CPN (Maoist) negotiating teams lacked women's participation. Key institutions established since April this year have also had no women members or seriously under-represented women's membership. For example, the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, the High Level Commission of Inquiry (the Rayamajhi Commission), the Ceasefire Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee. We await appointment of Commissioners to the National Human Rights Commission, and urge the Government to do better and ensure that women's representation is not merely tokenistic.

Implementing the measures set out in Resolution 1325 is not just about being seen to be doing the right thing. The Security Council passed this resolution because the lessons of experience show that a country can better prevent conflict, or resolve conflict and rebuild peace, if it has the active and equal participation of all its people. And, because women's and girls' rights are, simply, human rights, which must be respected. Nepal cannot afford to sideline half its population in the monumental effort to build peace after 11 years of bitter conflict.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate WOREC and FEDO for organising this important initiative in convening this Third National Consultation with Women Human Rights Defenders. I would like especially to applaud women human rights defenders from the towns and villages of the country for the work you do each day. And the leadership of FEDO in this Consultation highlights the struggle of women from communities, such as Dalit communities, who suffer multiple discrimination. Your struggle to protect and promote human rights in your communities – social, cultural and economic rights as well as civil and political rights – makes a vital contribution to the nation on an everyday basis as well as inspiring a new generation of Nepali girls to become leaders at all levels of society. Women's leadership and active participation in the peace process, at all levels, is good for peace in Nepal.

I wish you well for the coming days of this important meeting, and thank you once again for inviting me to join you.

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