



Speech by Sandra Beidas

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**National Conference on Indigenous Women of Nepal,
International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

9 August 2007

It gives me great pleasure, especially as a woman representing the United Nations, to be invited to speak at this first ever conference of indigenous women of Nepal. That such a conference should be held is perhaps an indication of progress that women are making in creating a space for their voices to be heard.

Today we are marking International Day of the World's Indigenous People to draw attention to the discrimination faced by indigenous groups and to advocate for effective action to protect their rights. In that context, Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the Special Rapporteur for indigenous people, are calling on member states of the United Nations to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the General Assembly in the forthcoming days.

Ending discrimination and social exclusion of indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups is one of the biggest challenges of the peace process in Nepal. Women belonging to marginalised groups face multiple discrimination and have been excluded from all spheres of development, as well as risking trafficking, domestic violence and other abuses without redress. The commitments that have been made by the parties to tackle these deep-rooted issues are to be commended but must be translated into concrete actions. It is positive to note that the agreement this week between the Government and NEFIN includes provisions related to access to development for women.

Creating an inclusive Nepalese society will take time. But greater representation for marginalized groups in the Constituent Assembly – including greater representation of Janajati women - should provide an unprecedented opportunity for such groups to have a strong role in determining the shape and nature of the new Nepal. Ending discrimination against women is not only the role of Government and political parties, however. Indigenous groups themselves must ensure that their own communities fully respect the rights of all women and girls to participate equally in society, as well as to be protected from abuse.

The adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People will provide an important tool for indigenous organizations in Nepal and other countries around the world in their

efforts to achieve respect for the rights of their communities. OHCHR is encouraged by the announcement that the Government will ratify ILO Convention 169 relating to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. The Convention requires that its provisions be applied equally to women and men. OHCHR urges that the Government ratifies the convention immediately. Such a step would show a strong commitment to bringing about meaningful change and fully recognizing the rights of indigenous communities in Nepal.

Finally, the inclusion of women from all sectors – including indigenous peoples - as actors of change in the peace process is an essential step towards building a more equal and less discriminatory society. This conference has served to draw attention to the important role that Janajati women can play in that process and in advocating for change. I congratulate the National Network of Indigenous Women and their associates on this initiative to hold this conference and offer OHCHR's support in urging greater recognition and respect for your rights as women and as indigenous people.