



**Statement by Richard Bennett
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
Delivered at the HURON Program to mark Human Rights Day
10 December 2007, Kathmandu**

Honorable Minister of Peace and Reconstruction, Mr. Ramchandra Poudel, President and Members of the Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON), Distinguished guests, Colleagues and Friends:

Firstly, I would like to wish everyone a peaceful Human Rights Day. This year the Day marks the launch of a year long campaign leading to the 60thth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The theme of the campaign and that for today is *Dignity and Justice for all of us.*

OHCHR-Nepal knows that transforming that theme into reality in the year ahead remains an enormous challenge because, despite some positive developments, the human rights environment in the past 12 months has not improved.

The appointment of commissioners to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); the Supreme Court's handing down of decisions on disappearances – specifically the creation of a commission of inquiry on disappearances – and in the Maina Sunuwar case, and the Government's ratification of ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples were examples of steps in the right direction. However, intensified efforts are required to tackle the most pressing issues: the public security vacuum, especially in the Tarai; the lack of accountability for past and continuing human rights violations; and continuing inequalities affecting marginalized groups, women and people living in remote areas.

Nepal has proclaimed its commitment to human rights through, for instance, ratification of international treaties, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and provisions in the Interim Constitution. However, converting these commitments into realities for the people of Nepal is a formidable task requiring increased determination and persistence by all involved. OHCHR-Nepal believes that progress towards promoting and protecting human rights is a key measure of overall progress in the transition of post-conflict Nepal. Conversely, failure to protect human rights and to stem human rights violations augers poorly for the peace process, both in the short and in the long term.

In this context I would like to pay tribute to those women and men who over the past year have continued with courage, determination and skill to promote and protect human rights this year, including members of the women's movement, groups working for the rights of ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, disabled persons, sexual minorities, other socially marginalized groups, and, of course, human rights defenders organizations, such as HURON. I would like to encourage all of these groups to continue approaching OHCHR-Nepal for support and collaboration.

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I assure you that we will continue to do our utmost to fulfill the responsibilities in our mandate, which was extended this year until 2009. Amongst other things, those responsibilities include providing "advisory services and support to the National Human Rights Commission, representatives of civil society, human rights NGOs and individuals".

I would like to conclude my remarks by quoting from the Human Rights Day statement of Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights: "In the course of this year, unprecedented efforts must be made to ensure that every person in the world can rely on just laws for his or her protection. In advancing all human rights for all, we will move towards the greatest fulfilment of human potential, a promise which is at the heart of the Universal Declaration.

Thank you.