



**Statement by Richard Bennett
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
Delivered at a Programme on Human Rights Education and the UN Convention on the
Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Organized by Independent Living Centre for People with Disabilities (CIL Kathmandu)
28 January 2008, Kathmandu**

Honourable Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Pampha Bhushal, Members of the Independent Living Centre for People with Disabilities, Colleagues and Friends,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this program on human rights education, particularly focussed on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As many of you might know, the Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006, and has now been signed by 123 countries, including Nepal on the 3rd of January 2008. Ratifications are at 14, six shy of the number needed for the Convention to come into force. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the Government to ratify the Convention.

My time is short, so I will turn quickly to address the focus of your very comprehensive programme: how to ensure that the vision and articles of the Convention are transformed into reality in order to better the lives of persons living with disabilities (PWDs); **and** the role that OHCHR-Nepal can play in that process.

This is the third speech that my Office has made about the Convention since it was adopted. I believe that public advocacy such as this by OHCHR-Nepal of the rights of PWDs helps to raise the awareness of the general public, as well as policy makers, about this community and about the Convention in particular. OHCHR-Nepal also ensures that such statements are distributed to the Government, other political actors, the international community and civil society.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva also co-authored the recently published handbook *From Exclusion to Equality: Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. OHCHR-Nepal has begun distributing that book in the Valley and the regions and looks forward to discussing with CIL Kathmandu and other organizations how to further utilize this tool to improve the respect for the human rights of PWDs.

While OHCHR globally has sought to establish specific projects on human rights and disability, it has also aimed to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities in the work of existing human rights bodies. In this regard, OHCHR has promoted the inclusion of information on human rights and disability in the universal periodic review reports for the Human Rights Council.

I don't mind admitting that it was after a meeting in 2007 with an organization representing PWDs that OHCHR-Nepal began publicly referring to disabled persons as comprising one of the marginalized communities that must be brought into the mainstream of social and political life in Nepal, along with Dalits, Madheshis, Janajatis/Adivasis, etc. We extended that approach in our interactions with the Government in terms of the need for representation of these communities in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, and will continue to do so as we urge the Government and the political parties to take the steps needed so that these groups will be able to participate in the nation-building process as equal partners.

Finally, congratulations again on this programme. I however that you will send me your action plan after its completion.

Thank you.