



Statement by Richard Bennett
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
Delivered at the Inauguration of the INSEC Training Programme,
Defending the Right to Defend Human Rights in Nepal
29 May 2008, Godhavari Village Resort

INSEC General Secretary Mr Bijaya Gautam; INSEC Chairperson Mr Subodh Raj Pyakurel; other participants:

I would like to speak quite informally as I feel that I am among friends and colleagues. I congratulate the people of Nepal for the convening of the historic Constituent Assembly yesterday following an election that resulted in the most inclusive representative body Nepal has yet known. I was not here in Nepal for much of your struggle but I know that human rights defenders have made an impressive contribution towards achieving this stage in the peace process and I pay tribute to you. Many challenges lie ahead if as SRSG Ian Martin said in his statement last night “the people's aspirations for sustained peace, economic and social progress, democracy and human rights” are to be fulfilled.

In this context, the role played by human rights defenders remains as important as it has ever been in promoting and protecting human rights, in ensuring that the trend towards inclusiveness and away from unfair discrimination continues and in advocating to end the culture of impunity for human rights violations. Your input to the process of drafting a new constitution will be especially vital.

We at OHCHR-Nepal are well aware that human rights defenders in this country often work under very difficult circumstances; that some of you have been, or will be, threatened and intimidated by various actors including state security forces, armed groups and political cadres. In this respect I deplore the killing on 26 May of Jitendra Yadav, sub-regional coordinator of INHURED International in Bara, Parsa and Rautahat.

We know also that at times you feel like you have no where to turn for security, especially those of you who live in remote regions. However, one of the main reasons that I wanted to attend this training beginning today, in which OHCHR-Nepal is pleased to participate, was to tell you that you do have such support. My office works closely with human rights defenders throughout the country, both from our headquarters and from offices in each region, and will take the steps necessary to protect HRDs who are under threat. You have other supporters. Last year, the European Union released *Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders*. Among other things they pledge to create ‘safe houses’ for HRDs in great danger; to ensure that all EU-funded human rights projects include a security element and security training; and to raise the public profile of issues concerning HRDs by doing such things as issuing press releases and inviting HRDs to formal events at embassies.

Human Rights Defenders also have support internationally, via the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, which you will learn more about here today, and through the Special

Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, whose job is to make country visits, report on respect for the rights of HRDs throughout the world, communicate with states about her findings, and then to report those findings to the Human Rights Council. Between 2 December 2006 and 10 December 2007, the Special Representative sent 372 communications to 76 countries, dealing with the cases of 835 defenders.

So, as you can see, although you might work quite alone in your home district, you are really not alone and are connected to a network of people and a system of recognition working for human rights in Nepal and internationally. Please do not hesitate to call on OHCHR's offices or our colleagues at the NHRC whenever you feel the need. Meanwhile I wish you well with the training programme that is about to begin.

Thank you.

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