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Statement to the Media
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Namaste

On behalf of OHCHR I would like to welcome you all to this press briefing today. I take this opportunity to thank the local authorities, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), human rights defenders and especially the local people for their cooperation during my two-day visit in Biratnagar.

The objective of my visit is to recognise and support the efforts made by journalists, the NHRC, human rights defenders and the authorities here in Morang district to protect journalists and their right to freedom of expression.

In addition through my visit OHCHR seeks to support some important local initiatives under way to end violence against women by outlawing the practice of boksi. OHCHR also wishes to acknowledge the many positive steps forward taken by the Muslim community to promote the rights of women in this district.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the people of Amganchi have established a model for us through their campaign to declare their VDC free of allegations of boksi by November 25 this year. These efforts by the local communities need to be commended.

One of the serious concerns repeatedly raised during my visit is the growth of pervasive and widespread impunity. Impunity for Violence against Women (VAW), impunity for human rights violations and impunity for violent crime. The recent brutal attacks and intimidation reported against journalists, and even the police as well as their families, are indicative of the grave situation of impunity in Nepal. I have been told that people are able to make threats and use violence because they know that they will not be punished nor be held accountable.

The courage of all those including journalists who, despite the evident dangers, are willing to speak out is impressive. Also impressive is the strength of their conviction that the only way to have crimes addressed is through the rule of law. Many of those we have spoken with agree on the importance of fostering an impartial environment in which the police and the justice system can function without interference – including to protect

victims from further threats, and to punish individuals found to have violated the law.

OHCHR also supports the concerns voiced recently by a delegation of senior editors to the Prime Minister, about the seriousness of the threats to journalists and to freedom of expression. Let me inform you that I am in contact with some of the leading editors and the leadership of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists in Kathmandu in this regard. The NHRC has also expressed its concern about the situation and OHCHR is working to support its efforts for fostering accountability.

I would like to inform you that many people, during my visit here, have expressed satisfaction with the professionalism displayed by the Nepal Police in its response to the recent threats and attacks directed at journalists. Unfortunately many here have also told me that political forces are protecting the criminals and sheltering the perpetrators.

I welcome the recent remarks by key political actors voicing support for the rule of law and promising to prevent interference by political affiliates in criminal cases presently under review. It is very important that criminal allegations are addressed through the due process of the law. Indeed that is what so many Nepalis are calling for.

With that I would like to close, and am happy to respond your questions.

Thank you for your attention.