



**Remarks by Frederick Rawski
Head of Eastern Regional Office - Biratnagar
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
At a Programme to Mark Human Rights Day and the 60th Anniversary of the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
10 December 2008, Chhintang, Dhankuta District**

Six decades ago, the member states of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration has since been published in more than 300 languages worldwide and is known to people in all countries of the world. The Declaration has become a beacon for those of us who aspire to a world where every woman, man and child is treated equally and with dignity. Its simple yet profound vision of a world where every woman, man and child is treated equally and with dignity has inspired people worldwide, many of whom have devoted much of their lives to human rights work – including a number of you here today.

As many of you are aware, OHCHR has had a presence in the Eastern Region of Nepal for three years now. During that time, which included the dramatic *jana aandolan* of April 2006 and the election of the Constituent Assembly earlier this year, the people of Nepal have made it clear that they desire peace and stability, but not at the expense of justice and accountability for the violence of the past. This event – the Khoku-Chhintang Human Rights Marathon – is a joint effort of many people. It is an effort of international, government and non-government organizations; of journalists, teachers, activists and ordinary citizens, to raise our voices together publicly to insist that human rights – and justice and accountability in particular – remain a central and indispensable part of the peace process.

The killings that occurred in Khoku-Chhintang 30 years ago have yet to be properly investigated, and no perpetrators have been brought to justice. But this week's activities are not about one incident. Sadly, Khoku-Chhintang is only one of many thousands of examples of cases in which serious human rights violations have neither been properly investigated nor prosecuted. A climate of impunity continues to reign in Nepal.

It is sometimes argued that in a post-conflict environment, it is better not to seek justice for fear that prosecutions or other forms of accountability will disrupt the peace process. We disagree. We believe that only by establishing mechanisms of accountability for human rights violations now, and strengthening the independence of key institutions such as the NHRC, police and prosecutors' offices can a peaceful government based on rule of law be established.