Remarks by Anthony Cardon,
Officer-in-Charge, OHCHR-Nepal
At the opening ceremony of Human Rights National Magna Meet 2010
9 December 2010, Basantapur, Kathmandu

Namaste,

Honorable Chief Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission, Coordinator of Human Rights National Magna Meet-2010, Honorable Members of the Constituent Assembly, Excellencies; former Commissioners, Government Officials, friends and colleagues from the human rights community, members of the media; Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first congratulate all the members of the Human Rights National Magna Meet-2009 which concluded remarkably last year with the 'Kathmandu Declaration-2009' and called for the accountability of the perpetrators of rights violations and promotion of rule of law in the country and I'm glad to know that this year, the Magna Meet is making an assessement of the follow up to this declaration. I truly believe that the continuation of Magna Meet with the support of all human rights organizations in Nepal is a real model for many other countries in the world.

As we celebrate Human Rights Day, let me convey to you the greetings from Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who this year proposed to applaud and honor the work of the champions of human rights - the human rights defenders - who stand in the front line and fight to end discrimination. You in Nepal, like in so many countries around the world are working to transform the world you live in into a world free from discrimination. In her message, the High Commissioner notes "'the work of human rights defenders is as vital today as it has ever been, because hundreds of millions of individuals still suffer directly or indirectly from some form of discrimination every day."

And yet, it is a reality that numerous human rights defenders continue to face challenges and dangers in their work. And let me emphasize that the protection of human rights defenders has been and will remain the ultimate priority for OHCHR, not only in Nepal but globally. But this is one task that we cannot do alone, we need help and support from all National Institutions as well as policy makers to establish the appropriate protection policies and mechanisms

This year, a series of seminars and consultations have been and will be held in the context of the Magna Meet. It will, *inter alia,* review policies of the National Human

Rights Commission, look into the role men can play to end violence against women and hold discussions on how to address caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

OHCHR and the National Dalit Commission recently reviewed the draft Bill on untouchability and have now proposed concrete recommendations to the Legislature-Parliament and other key actors to ensure that the Bill is consistent with the highest human rights standards and the commitments made by Nepal. I am confident that this analysis will serve you as a strong advocacy tool to help you in your efforts to end caste-based discrimination in Nepal.

Finally, we believe that it is critical for the constitution making process to address key human rights issues, in particular those related to the root causes of the conflict such as discrimination and violations of economic, social and cultural rights. This unique opportunity to strengthen the constitutional protection of all human rights, including rights against all forms of discrimination, should not be missed. In this regard, the need to ensure the strength and independence of the judiciary and other National Human Rights Institutions is essential to secure effective protection and promotion of human rights.

I would like to once again congratulate the organizers of the Human Rights National Magna Meet - 2010 and wish you all the very best for the upcoming events. OHCHR stands ready to support and work together with all of you and it is my conviction that by working together we can constructively address all forms of discrimination in the country and establish a society that respects, protects and promotes all human rights for all.

Thank you, *Dhanyabad*