

**Remarks by Rt. Hon. Nayan Bahadur Khatri at a Roundtable Meeting on  
Human Rights and Conflict in Nepal, January 18, 2003**

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first of all welcome you all to today's informal roundtable on human rights and the conflict in Nepal. It is indeed a pleasure to be a part of such a gathering of human rights experts, government officials, and representatives from the diplomatic community, development agencies and the United Nations. On behalf of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all the leading civil society human rights advocates from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka who have been here for the past two days as a part of South Asia Civil Society Consultations.

In the past two days, you have discussed various issues on governance, democratization, conflict, globalization and human rights. The importance and relevance of organizing an event with discussions on such issues under the prevailing situation of conflict in Nepal is surely not lost on anyone. Yet, as a peace loving citizen of a country known as the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the apostle of peace who always preached non-violence, I am despaired by the sad irony of history when we ourselves are now mired in an environment of violent conflict and are desperately seeking ways to re-establish peace and harmony in Nepal.

The root cause of the conflict in Nepal is a complex web of interacting factors. These include uneven development within the country; endemic corruption; ethnic and caste inequalities; intense politicization; human rights

abuse; social exclusion and deprivation, and inadequate infrastructure development. Nepal has had several experimentations with different types of ruling systems and democracy was reestablished in 1990. Since the nineties, a chronic unstable political atmosphere has been the leading cause for gross maladministration and bad governance in the country. I think the representatives of the people must therefore bear full responsibility for their negligence in disregarding the perennial needs and aspirations of the Nepalese people. The atmosphere of instability and uncertainty has also provided viable grounds for the rise of discontented groups such as the Maoists.

The conflict has now spiraled into a protracted internal war which has severely hampered development and democratic progress. Both the Maoists and security forces have been involved in systematic human rights abuse creating a general atmosphere of fear and insecurity. It is very distressing to note that the number of casualties in the conflict has already crossed seven thousand and the killings in such a massive scale are an unprecedented occurrence in the history of our country. The conflict also poses a serious concern for the Commission as most of the casualties in the conflict have been civilians.

The government and the Maoists have stated their willingness to talk, subject to conditions, but it is not clear whether these statements are rhetorical. After the failure of talks and the subsequent declaration of the State of Emergency last year, both sides adopted military strategies and thereafter, positions of the two sides have become more and more polarized.

Amidst such an environment of conflict, the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal was established about two and a half years ago and thus it had to face an uphill struggle to protect and promote human rights since its very inception. Nevertheless, the Commission in spite of its few years of experience has already earned some reputation as a credible institution. As an independent organization, it is set to commit itself to the goal of establishing a society where all citizens have the opportunity with guaranteed protection from the state to enjoy their basic human rights and other fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution.

As a human rights institution we face two major challenges at present. Firstly, it is the immediate challenge of protecting human rights of people in a situation of armed conflict. Secondly, as a prerequisite for a better human rights environment, we face the challenge of finding ways to re-establish peace in the nation. The utter contempt of the very basic right to life of the people due to the indiscriminate killings has gravely undermined overall human rights situation in the country. We at the Commission believe that as an immediate measure, it is imperative that the Government and the Maoists bring a halt to the conflict by initiating a process of dialogue in earnest. We also hope that calls for talks by both the sides are not limited to mere rhetoric and would be followed by sincere efforts to actualize dialogue. In the long run, successful conflict reduction initiatives and peace-building measures must also take into account and address the underlying factors I mentioned earlier as well as the issue of establishing a culture of human rights and rule of law in the country.

In conclusion, I believe the discussions on human rights and the conflict in Nepal would be greatly aided by the studies and experiences of other

conflicts in the South Asian region. I would also consider the meeting to have achieved its objectives if you are able to come up with concrete suggestions and proposals towards ameliorating and resolving the situation of conflict and improving the human rights condition in Nepal.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for co-organizing such an event with the focus on the conflict and human rights in Nepal. Similarly, I thank the British Embassy for its support in organizing this event.

Thank You