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**Statement by Honorable Minister for Foreign
Affairs and leader of the Nepali Delegation,
Mrs. Sahana Pradhan
at the 7th Session of the Human Rights
Council**

Geneva, Monday March 3, 2008

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Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me commend you, Mr. President, for the hard work and untiring efforts you have put in to successfully steer the Human Rights Council over the last year and the careful attention that has gone into the preparations of this Session. My delegation expresses full confidence in your leadership, and assures you of its full support to take the proceedings to a successful conclusion.

Mr. President,

As I address this Council, an inner sense of awe and inspiration arises in my mind towards the quintessential words of wisdom and solemnity with which the brilliant authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights crafted this international instrument of far reaching importance sixty years ago. On this Diamond Jubilee year of the Universal Declaration, I think it befitting to pay our rich tributes to them with a pledge to redouble our efforts, nationally as well as internationally, to achieve those common standards of human rights, freedom and justice for all human beings without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Nepal firmly believes in the universality of human rights and considers all rights, civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development as indivisible, interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Accordingly, the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 guarantees the protection and promotion of human rights together with a wide spectrum of fundamental rights to the people of Nepal.

We commend the contributions made by the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in ensuring protection of human rights and in raising awareness about the need for respecting human rights and their interdependence with socio-economic and political progress. Nepal continues to work together with her office in promoting and protecting all human rights.

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council is in the third year of its valued existence. The Universal Periodic Review is indeed an innovative measure adopted by the Council. Its operational mechanism needs to properly dovetail with the foundational objectives and goals of the Council. We uphold the view that the principle of objectivity, non-selectivity, universality, and non-politicization of the review process and coverage should be fully respected.

Mr. President,

We are following with great interest the process of review, rationalization and improvement of the mandates during this session. Mandate holders have played important roles in promoting human rights and help broaden their protection base. We would like to emphasize that appointment of the mandate holders should reflect regional, linguistic, socio-cultural, and political diversities as well as integrating gender perspectives to report on the condition of human rights of women. Their works should be impartial and maintain high standards of integrity. We should also be open to conduct the review of Special Procedures, Mandate Holders, and Complaint Procedures and accommodate the best practices that emerge from the review process of the first and subsequent batches of countries.

Mr. President,

Human Rights Council has an essential role to play to strengthen the human rights of women. Its resolution on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations provides a crucial framework:

- to encourage the international community to pay systematic attention to the recommendations of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women,
- to urge all stakeholders to take into full account both the human rights of women as well as gender perspective in the Universal Periodic Review,
- to request all special procedures and other mechanisms of the Council to systematically integrate a gender perspective into the implementation of their mandate and to include in their reports information on human rights of women.

As a Woman Minister I would appreciate the work of the Office of High Commissioner on the advancement of human rights of women.

Mr. President,

In my own country Nepal, the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in November 2006 ended the decade-long armed conflict and has paved the way for peace and stability. The political process that followed the CPA has been instrumental in

creating a conducive environment for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

We are currently in the midst of a great transition towards democratic peace and stability in the country. We have to take into account deep rooted socio-political divisions in the entire process. However, we feel that we are making a determined move along our chosen path to peace, democracy and social justice consistently in an accelerated manner. For a country emerging out of a decade-long violent conflict, this is an important positive development. Our whole national effort is currently being focused on holding the Constituent Assembly elections which will institutionalize and stabilize peace, democracy and justice in the country. While remaining committed to justice and human rights, we are moving ahead towards consolidating peace and reconciliation in the country.

The homegrown peace process has demonstrated that there is no better alternative to democracy for a country's stability, progress and prosperity. We greatly appreciate the assistance from the UN Mission in Nepal as a facilitator to advance the peace process, particularly by carrying out the task of monitoring the management of arms and armed personnel. The Government is working together with the UNMIN and other UN agencies in Nepal in developing modalities for releasing, rehabilitating and integrating the minors and other disqualified combatants following the completion of the verification process.

Mr. President,

We firmly believe that only the democratic path paves the way for a harmonious, just and equitable society in a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious setting. The people of Nepal look forward to April 10 as a great historic day when they will vote for the Constituent Assembly elections. Full preparations have been made for the elections and the government has been doing its best to ensure the broadest possible participation of the people in the elections. Just a couple of days ago, on 28 February, the Government and the United Democratic Madhesi Front have entered into an agreement ensuring the participation of a large section of agitating Madhesi community in the upcoming elections. We appeal for the participation of as many international election observers as possible in this historic mission.

Mr. President,

I would like to reiterate our total commitment to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. The Government considers the respect of human rights as the central to the peace process. A second three year National Human Rights Action Plan is currently under implementation.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has been constituted as a constitutional body in keeping with the spirit of the Paris Principles. Its constitutional status guarantees full autonomy and independence. The Commission has unfettered access to all scenes of human rights violations and to conduct investigations. The Government is committed to make the Commission professionally sound and resourceful.

There is no substitute for strengthened national capacity to ensure compliance with human rights requirements and international obligations. International support can complement national efforts by way of providing technical assistance and extending support for domestic capacity building. Investment in capacity building will significantly help in the promotion and protection of human rights on a sustainable manner.

Various National Commissions are in place for the promotion and protection of the rights and interests of the women, Dalits and oppressed communities and indigenous nationalities. Nepal has recently ratified ILO Convention 169 that guarantees the protection of the rights of the indigenous people.

Mr. President,

Democracy, development and human rights are mutually reinforcing. Social injustice, deprivation and blatant violation of human rights are the major sources of instability. The Government of Nepal believes that no lasting peace is possible without dialogue and reconciliation and no uplifting of downtrodden section of society is attainable without democracy and human rights.

The Government of Nepal sincerely appreciates the goodwill and support from the international community extended to us during the peaceful democratic movement and for the forthcoming Constituent Assembly election as a crucial component of the ongoing peace process. As we prepare to move in the critical phase of our democratic transition to fulfill the main mandate of the People's Movement- the Constituent Assembly election, there is greater need for external assistance and support than ever before. I would like to urge our friends and well wishers in the international community for an enhanced level of support and assistance in sustaining the peace process, institutionalizing and consolidating democratic norms and values, and in rebuilding the country as a stable, prosperous and democratic nation.

Thank you, Mr. President.