

**Speech Delivered by Rt. Hon. President of Nepal
Bidya Devi Bhandari
at Inaugural Session of the International Conference on
"Identifying Challenges, Assessing Progress, Moving Forward:
Addressing Impunity and Realizing Human Rights in South Asia"**

Hotel Yak and Yeti, Durbarmarg, Kathmandu

*Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal,
Chairpersons and representatives of Human Rights Commissions of the South Asian region,
Representatives of the Human Rights Institutions who have gathered here from different
countries,
Human Rights activists,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

I am delighted to welcome the representatives of Human Rights Commissions of South Asia and the Asia Pacific, who have gathered here today to discuss the progress and possible reforms in the condition of human rights in our region. I am pleased to inaugurate such an important conference.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to be able to attend and share my understanding with the high level representatives from the human rights commissions of the neighboring countries and in the presence of international experts on human rights.

At a time when human rights norms have been universalized, it is a matter of satisfaction that the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal has organized this international conference. This is a laudable attempt to create a common platform for national human rights commissions of the Asia Pacific region where they will be able to share their experiences.

The Constitution of Nepal, which was drafted by people's representatives elected to the Constituent Assembly and was promulgated in 2015, has given top priority to human rights. The Preamble of the Constitution itself accommodates the fundamental human rights norms, along with the determination to attain them through the democratic process. Our Constitution has also incorporated the provisions of inclusion and proportional representation as fundamental rights, along with the human rights norms as guaranteed by the United Nations.\

This is undoubtedly an extremely progressive Constitution, and it is now the responsibility of the Government of Nepal to draft the required laws necessary for the implementation of the guaranteed fundamental rights.

I believe that the discussion and sharing of experiences in the area of protecting and promoting human rights in the South Asian region will be extremely important for the sake of quality of life and livelihood in this region.

In the context of sharing experiences, let me state with some satisfaction that Nepal has achieved peaceful transformation from conflict and has successfully addressed major issues including those of inclusion, electoral systems and human rights. The Supreme Court of Nepal has delivered important judgements that stand as precedents in the protection of conflict victims. I believe that the protection of human rights during the time of conflict and the experience gained

by our human rights mechanisms at the time of transition can be useful for other countries as well.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006 has provided a framework for transitional justice. We should leave no stone unturned to fundamentally internalize and embrace the mechanisms established to provide justice to the victims of conflict. In my view, the Government is duly-bound to resolve the problems that have emerged in attainment of transitional justice. Our experience has shown that the judicial system of Nepal, including the courts, is fully capable of dispensing justice in any kind of situation.

As we all know, human rights, democracy and rule of law are interdependent. Protection of human rights can be achieved only through internalizing democratic values and the guarantee of due process. Therefore, I would like to reiterate the ideals of democracy, human rights and social welfare state as enshrined in our new Constitution. I believe that this conference will be successful in identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by human rights in our region, and help take the implementation of human rights ideals in South Asia to new heights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The understanding of human rights should certainly not be confined to speeches and writings, but permeate our everyday lives. In the context of ensuring human rights, as important as civil and political rights are the economic, social and cultural rights. Without the implementation of human rights broadly understood, democracy cannot be people-oriented, and without guaranteeing human rights, democracy cannot be institutionalized.

Over the decades, the political parties of Nepal have been engaged in a series of untiring struggles for democracy and human rights. In today's context, with leaders who have contributed to democracy and human rights established at the helm of state leadership, I believe, strong attempts will be made to end impunity. In this context, the National Human Rights Commission has played an important role to combat impunity. Relevant laws should be reformed as required to strengthen the role of the Commission to combat impunity.

I believe that the conference will be productive because its agenda includes discussions on the different types of discriminations in South Asia, including the rights of marginalized groups, collective rights, as well as violence against women. The matter of rule of law, due process as well as combating impunity, I hope, will receive due importance.

I thank the office bearers at National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, the Government of Nepal as well as all the supporting organizations for organizing such an important conference. I would also like to thank all the chairpersons and members of national human rights institutions representing different countries, human rights experts and all distinguished guests for accepting the invitation of the National Human Rights Commission and taking part in this conference.

I wish this conference all success, and firmly believe that your presence in this important event will help further institutionalize human rights in our region, through coordination among the human rights mechanisms of the region.

9th April, 2018, Monday