

Key Note Speech by Chief Guest Honorable Anup Raj Sharma, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Honorable Chair of the program, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

I feel privileged to be invited as a Chief Guest at the workshop organized by the Centre for Media Freedom and UNESCO on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day with the universal slogan "Press Freedom in Digital Age, Gender Equality and the Protection of Journalists". It's indeed an honor for me and I would like to thank the organizers from the core of my heart.

As all of us present here know that we have been enduring a massive devastation due to the deadly earthquake that hit the nation in April and May 2015. More than 9,000 people lost their lives and millions of them have been rendered homeless, physically injured and even displaced from their homes of the habitual residence due to the deadly earthquake. Human rights, on other hand, became yet an unusually significant issue for those voiceless and marginalized communities especially in the earthquake affected districts.

Indeed, it has become very difficult to ensure human rights during such types of natural catastrophe. In this regard, I would like to let you all know that the NHRC monitoring teams were deployed in the earthquake ravaged districts to monitor the human rights situation from the day one of the unprecedented incident of earthquake though the office building of the Commission itself had suffered the irreparable damage causing all our daily works dormant. The Commission, however, relentlessly engaged in post-quake rebuilding efforts including monitoring human rights situation across the country and made the preliminary report public with the necessary recommendations sent to the government urging for appropriate and early action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Though the responsibility of implementing human rights commitments primarily lies on the government, the mainstream media has significant role to play on the regard. Since, the journalists as human rights defenders are the flag bearers of civil society, they serve as catalyst not only in nurturing human rights culture in society but also in defending human rights. Their role has been overwhelmingly illustrious in bridging the society and the government be it in conflict period or in the post conflict period or at all time. Above all, the exemplary role played by the journalists and the media houses during and in the post-quake period has been wholeheartedly commenced far and wide. It is only with the efforts and endeavors of the media that the Nepalese people have been able to enjoy the constitutionally provisioned right to information at all time. Broadly speaking, with the neo-technological innovation, we live in a digital era in which press freedom is enjoyed by on-line media world in a swift and wide spectrum in a democratic country like ours. However, I am of the opinion that press freedom should be used a holistic to analyze both sides of the coin before the people are informed any news they served with.

In this context, there are abundant examples that the human rights defenders have sacrificed their lives for the protection of human rights. Some have given up their lives and become the victims of beastly act

of the perpetrators because they have exposed human rights violators or their criminal acts through media reports; some have faced the humiliation and threat to their life for having appeared in the court of law as legal counsel on behalf of the victims. The sacrifices of Tekendra Thapa or Prakash Shah or Uma Singh – who have lost their lives in pursuit of dedication to duty, are a few examples. Similarly, Tika Bista suffered severe injury and Dayaram Pariyar; an NHRC Nepal employee lost his life while on duty during the conflict period.

The sacrifice and contribution made by these human rights defenders will be remembered and held with high esteem. The Commission has always expressed its solidarity towards press freedom and expressed its commitments for the protection of the journalists.

In this regard, with the deepest concern expressed on the incidents of killing of journalists and the death threat posed to them by perpetrators, the Commission has always exerted pressure on the concerned authorities to ensure their protection and also to drag to justice involved in such hideous act. I am of the opinion that the criminal law of our country should enact such crimes as grave offense making provision for stern action against such offenders.

In a number of cases, the Commission has recommended to the government for stern action against the perpetrator of such acts. As I have come to know, the cases of Laxmi Bohra, Uma Singh and Tika Bista are some examples of important cases relating to women human rights defenders that the NHRC has looked into within past couple of years.

Today, Nepal is undergoing very critical phase. While are engaged in rebuilding the devastated infrastructures on the one hand, violation of human rights of the people tend to take place sporadically on the other. Similarly, the constitution making process appeared to have tapped the speedy momentum though the state of uncertainty is still looming large which is likely to jeopardize human rights of the people further. This has to end very soon. In such situation, only our combined efforts will pave ways to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in the country. Together, we can make things happen and I am confident about it.

With these few words of mine, I wish a grand success of the workshop. Have a wonderful day! Thank you.