

UNMIN will do all it can to help Nepal hold a credible election in a free and fair atmosphere in April

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The Interim Government has announced that the Constituent Assembly election will be held on 10 April. The Security Council has just extended UNMIN's mandate, and we will do all we can, within this mandate, to assist Nepal hold a credible election in a free and fair atmosphere in April.

A credible CA election is a key step toward consolidating democracy, peace and development in Nepal. The 23-point agreement between the members of the Seven-Party Alliance came after long and difficult negotiations, and I reiterate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's congratulations for the spirit of compromise they displayed in reaching their decisions. But this is no time to rest: 10 April is not far away, and there is much to be done to create the conditions for an inclusive, free and fair election.

There are two main priorities in the follow-up to the 23-point agreement: implementation of agreements and commitments already made, and dialogue with all democratic forces outside the Seven-Party Alliance, particularly Madhesi and Janajatis and other traditionally marginalised groups, to ensure that the Constituent Assembly election is broadly inclusive.

The 23-point agreement provides for the creation of six commissions and committees. This is an important step in organising the architecture of the peace process in a coherent and more effective way. UNMIN looks forward to working closely with these mechanisms, in particular the high-level monitoring committee and the Peace Commission. The United Nations system as a whole stands ready to assist as requested. OHCHR, for instance, can contribute to the establishment and effectiveness of the commission to investigate disappearances. It could also assist in the process of consultation, as well as advising on the international human rights standards and legal framework required to create an effective truth and reconciliation commission that will bring truth and justice to victims who suffered so much during the war.

The 23-point agreement also stated that arrangements would be made for the immediate discharge from the Maoist army cantonments of those disqualified in the verification, subject to payment of allowances. UNMIN, UNICEF and UNDP will now work with the Government and the Maoist army on arrangements for orderly discharge and reintegration of those involved. I am pleased that the Council of Ministers is reactivating the special committee responsible for integration of the verified combatants of the Maoist army. The cantonment of Maoist combatants and the restriction of the Nepal Army to barracks is a temporary arrangement designed to assist in the creation of a positive atmosphere for the CA election. I have repeatedly stressed that long-term arrangements and solutions which will eventually bring to an end UNMIN's arms monitoring responsibilities need to begin to be devised. This is a priority area deserving the urgent attention and cooperation of all sides.

The Secretary-General and UNMIN have always attached great importance to the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups: they have a strong interest in the election of a representative Constituent Assembly which will restructure the state. So at the same time as I appeal to the Government and the seven parties to address the legitimate concerns of these groups, I urge that those concerns are pursued through peaceful dialogue, in a spirit of flexibility and compromise, and not through violence.

Nepal's democracy is dependent to a great extent on the State and the main political actors abiding by their commitments to non-violence, political pluralism and respect for human rights. Every registered party must be able to campaign without impediment, and every voter must feel free of intimidation. Today too many citizens in Terai districts are living in fear of violence from armed groups and without effective local governance or law and order. Intimidation, extortion and political violence still persist in varying degrees in other parts of the country as well. I hope that the newly-formed Coordination Committee of top political leaders will rapidly reach the envisaged agreement to create local bodies. And it is my strong hope that the Government and the seven parties will engage those groups that have not yet fully committed themselves to the election in serious dialogue to address outstanding differences.

The Election Commission has asked UNMIN's Electoral Assistance Office to reassemble our team of electoral advisers, including those to be deployed to the districts. We are setting this in motion. The United Nations has joined the Government and the Election Commission in encouraging the dispatch of as many international election observers as possible around the country, in addition to national observers. There will also be further visits of the UN Electoral Expert Monitoring Team that made three visits before the last postponement of the ballot.

The UN Security Council has now unanimously affirmed the United Nations readiness to continue to extend all necessary assistance to help Nepal hold the CA election on time, in an inclusive manner and in a free and fair atmosphere. The responsibility to achieve this lies with all of us in Nepal: principally Nepal's political parties, and all democratic forces within Nepal, but also ordinary citizens, local government authorities, law enforcement officials and civil society as well as UNMIN and other external actors. The international community has once again responded positively to the request to support this process of democratic transition – UNMIN stands ready to fulfil its role