

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum
Peacebuilding in a Post-Conflict Situation: *The Case of Nepal*
July 10th, 2007

In Nepal, the last 10 years have been marked by a violent political struggle between the Monarchy and the Parliament, and complicated by the rise of an armed, peasant insurgency seeking to overturn Nepal's caste system. With the fragile peace now in place, the focus of this month's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum highlighted key practical steps underway in Nepal to build and strengthen this peace. The panel of speakers addressed a number of key processes needed to sustain the achievements of the past few years, as well as challenges in building and securing a stable Nepal, including processes for securing peace through the development of peace structures; steps being taken to restore respect for the rule of law; the role and importance of underprivileged and indigenous groups in securing the peace; and ways in which the energies and talents of Nepalese youth can best be harnessed in ensuring a successful and peaceful future. The panelists included Lydia Cordes from the Academy for Educational Development; Hom Raj Acharya, Founder of Books in Every Home in Nepal; Rajendra Mulmi, Program Manager for Community Peacebuilding for Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in Nepal; and Colette Rausch, Deputy Director of the Rule of Law Program at the United States Institute of Peace. Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Associate for Search for Common Ground, facilitated the event.

Lydia Cordes began the discussion by explaining the work of the Academy for Educational Development (AED) in Nepal over the past two years, mainly the Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative. The main objective of NTTP is to work to secure the peace in Nepal and ensure permanent peace structures in the country. Ms. Cordes explained the three areas NTTP focuses on: strengthening the capacity of all stakeholders in the peace process; creating an environment for honest and direct dialogue; and bringing about peace processes through permanent peace structures. The initiatives of NTTP provide organizational development and have improved access to information for the various political parties and helped the creation of peace libraries. The NTTP initiative works closely with many of the political parties, helping them to create peace units throughout the country. In addition, NTTP organizes "exposure trips". These trips enable stakeholders in the peace process – from different levels in the government and from different provinces – to travel to different countries in order to introduce them to various peace processes throughout the world.

In her presentation, Ms. Cordes described the work of AED and the NTTP initiative program as mostly existing in the realm of track "one and a half", i.e., the multi-party dialogues include advisors to the decision makers at various levels. Ms. Cordes also revealed that the hope and the goal of the NTTP initiatives is to help Nepal create permanent peace structures, which will include peace ministries at different levels of government throughout the country acting as mini peace secretariats for their respective communities. Finally, the NTTP initiative program is aimed to assist with establishing a truth and reconciliation process, which is written into the constitution and will commence after the Nepalese elections in the fall.

Rajendra Mulmi from SFCG Nepal began with a brief overview of the situation of youth in Nepal. In Nepal, the category of youth is defined as anyone between the ages of

16 and 35. 33.5% of the total Nepalese population falls into this category. 83% of Nepalese youth live in rural areas, while 40% of the urban population in Nepal is in the youth category. The unemployment rate for young people is 6%, while the literacy rate is 86.3% for urban youth and 56.7% for youth in rural areas. Mr. Mulmi explained that the ten-year conflict has taken a tremendous toll on the country's young people. In fact, much of the conflict was both fueled and fought by the youth, some of whom fought voluntarily, while others were recruited and even forced into armed conflict. The flight of young people who wanted to escape recruitment from the country has further added to the erosion of the social fabric of population.

As described by Mr. Mulmi, a large percentage of the Maoist army was made up of youth. One of the most apparent reasons for this, as explained by Mr. Mulmi, was that the Maoists provided young people with an opportunity to rise up through the ranks, make decisions, and to possess a type of power that young people do not normally have in Nepalese society. But Mr. Mulmi also explained that even now and most of the time young people still do not have access to the decision makers and that the needs and concerns of young people often go unheard or ignored; in the past and presently this has led to the recruitment of child soldiers, to displacement and even, as Mr. Mulmi states, to deaths. Besides, being involved in the conflict for many young people meant losing opportunities – educational and economic. In Mr. Mulmi's words, their lack of education puts young people at risk for being exploited, as has previously occurred.

Mr. Mulmi went on to talk about the work of Search for Common Ground with Nepalese youth. SFCG has established several programs in the country. Most recently the organization conducted a base line survey through which they found that many Nepalese youth have a strong feeling that they have no control over their fate or the fate of the country. Economic conditions are of great concern. On the positive end, the youth see themselves and each other as having the potential to be transformers and regard themselves as a powerful force. Yet, they feel they have not been accepted as problem solvers and not given the amount and type of trust they want. In fact, many young people feel they are constantly asked to listen, but not to question or comment on issues that affect them. Finally, the survey found that the youth feel that gender discrimination is a one of the biggest problems in their lives. From this study and from knowledge SFCG acquired previously, the organization has developed programs and projects that not only educated the youth of Nepal about important issues like that of their radio show, "New path, New Footsteps", but have also begun to develop programs that engage young people in activities which enable them to teach others effective tools, such as communication and negotiation skills.

Colette Rausch of USIP and the Rule of Law Program illuminated the goals of USIP: think, do, teach, and train. USIP and the Rule of Law program have been engaged in Nepal for the last two years. The institute's main focus has been on dialogue; bringing groups together who have had disabling differences, e.g. citizens and the citizen police. Ms. Rausch described the process in which these dialogues take place including a one-day session with each of the groups on their own, and then a final day where they are brought together. During these sessions individuals discuss their concerns and the challenges they have faced in regards to the other group. On the day when the two groups come together, Ms. Rausch revealed, typically the meeting begins with finger pointing and blaming of the other, but progressively each group begins to take

responsibility for their share of the problems and misunderstanding (which are often the root of many of the problems). Finally, the two groups begin to work together to draft a set of joint agreements for moving forward.

The first of these dialogue sessions was held in Katmandu and later carried out in Lahan and Nepalgunj. The program also brought together the Maoist and other political parties to engage in these dialogue groups. Ms. Rausch explained that the dialogue sessions used the same format every time but that the issues that surfaced in the different regions were distinct and different from one another. The purpose of these dialogue sessions is to give opposing parties the chance to come together and face one another; to allow all people involved to have a voice and to have that voice be heard; to sow the seeds for future discussions; and, finally, to take the concerns and the challenges that are voiced back to the policy makers, the belief being that the individuals involved in daily life and daily struggles are the best predictors of where things are going and how to approach the future. This coming October, USIP intends to gather all the information generated at these meetings and provide the Home Ministry in Katmandu with a comprehensive report.

This report will illuminate many of the challenges to security and the rule of law identified through the dialogues in the different regions, including: Maoist violence, the presence and influence of splinter groups, violence targeted at communities living in the hills, Hindu extremists, the fight over natural resources and other resources including petrol, and social and economic drivers, including the caste system and gender inequality. The report will also touch on some of the institutional challenges - Ms. Rausch named a few, including demoralization of the police force resulting from the transition that took place from a military force to a civilian police role. In this regard, as an important issue Ms. Rausch mentioned the need to stop political interference within the police. Further challenges include the lack of oversight, structure, security strategy and transparency in the government agencies. Finally, the USIP Rule of Law program report will cover some of the steps needed to strengthen the rule of law in the Nepalese society. For instance, Ms. Rausch named the need to engage civil society in the decision making process, the importance of building relationships across sectors and levels of government and civil society, as well as the need to be aware of the backlash that can result when a heavy handed rule of law and order is established.

The final speaker to present was Hom Raj Acharya, founder of Books in Every Home, a non-profit Nepalese organization dedicated to encouraging literacy and learning in the rural areas of Nepal. The organization worked throughout the insurgency and was able to gain access to many of the remote areas that others could not or would not venture into, especially, Mr. Acharya pointed out, many of the politicians and those politically appointed. Mr. Acharya talked about the need to continuously include in the peacebuilding process those in Nepal who are poor, disenfranchised and oppressed. He explained that if these groups of people are left out of the decision-making process, especially now in light of the newly achieved peace and with the forthcoming elections, it will create an incentive for further demoralization and rebellion. One of the principles of Mr. Archarya's organization is to actively listen to the communities being served; to ask them what it is they want and they need. For instance, Books in Every Home was working in one community where the women made it clear that their community needed

an early childhood learning center. The center then became a central project, which the organization embarked on.

Mr. Acharya made it clear that the type of inclusion that is being sought by people in Nepal does not simply mean having a member of parliament from every region. He believes that people are longing for a deeper sense of inclusion in the peace process and that they want and deserve a clear role in the truth and reconciliation process that is mentioned in the constitution. Mr. Acharya believes that every village in Nepal – there are four thousand villages – should have discussions and dialogues about what they would like to see happen in the coming years and how they envision the future of their country. It could then be, Mr. Acharya says, that these villages could be put into clusters. These clusters could come to an agreement about the concerns and challenges they see as being the most important. Finally, a major event could be planned where the concerns and hopes from each cluster are shared in Katmandu with the political parties and decision makers. This, Mr. Acharya believes, is the only way to ensure that the decisions that are made for the future of the country include the voice of the people. This inclusion will help secure a lasting peace for the country.

All of the panelists agreed that there are several opportunities in moving forward and in securing the peace that has been established thus far. All the panelists agreed that one of the objectives of peacebuilding programs and efforts is to change the general impression that violence is the way to change things in Nepal. There are also a number of challenges that must be addressed with diligence and a willingness to be inclusive, transparent, and fair.

For More information about USIP's work in Nepal please go to:

http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/1207_security_sector_nepal.html

Please see the following attachment for Rajendra Mulmi's Power Point presentations: