

## **Polycentric Approach to Peace in Nepal: Achievements and Hurdles<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

I am honored to represent Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in this important national seminar on 'Non-Linearity of Peace Process in Nepal'. I am thankful to the organizers for providing the opportunity to address the opening session of this event on behalf of the Ministry.

As we all are aware, Peace Secretariat was upgraded to the level of Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction to support implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that paved the way for peaceful transition in Nepal after a decade-long armed conflict. The armed conflict in Nepal resulted in significant changes in the level of awareness of Nepali people, political landscape and socio-cultural dimension. At the same time it had many negative consequences in the life of Nepali people as evident from the database of the Ministry with 17,886 deceased, 1535 disappeared, 8,191 injured or disabled, more than 4,800 widowed and so on. Public infrastructures that were damaged during the conflict account for more than 5,500. In the transition phase the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction was entrusted with planning and implementation of provisions made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Let me take this opportunity to highlight seven core functions that the Ministry has been undertaking since last six and half years.

### **Peacebuilding Functions**

The first important function of the Ministry was to support rehabilitation and integration of the Maoist Army Combatants through the provision of their management in the cantonments. The Ministry is proud to have supported this process, which has already concluded with 15,585 opting for voluntary retirement, 6 opting for rehabilitation package and 1,460 integrated into the Nepal Army. With the conclusion of this process, Nepal has accomplished very sensitive and significant milestones of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in a unique way. Peace loving citizens of Nepal should be thankful to the Special Committee and its Secretariat for achieving this historical landmark in the peace process of Nepal.

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Second core function of the Ministry is to plan and implement programs related to the relief and rehabilitation of conflict affected persons. Till date the Ministry has provided cash benefits as the relief package to 14,201 number of families of the deceased; 1,528 number of families of the disappeared; 4,552 number of widows of the deceased; 611 number of wives of the disappeared; and 7,996 number of injured or disabled. The Ministry is also providing monthly subsistence allowance to the conflict affected persons with disability higher than 51%. It has also provided interim relief to those kidnapped during conflict, and to those whose private properties were damaged or looted. In addition, educational allowances are being provided to the children of deceased and disappeared through the Ministry of Education. Similarly, 25,000 number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were also supported financially by the Ministry to return to their homes and reintegrate in their societies.

In terms of rehabilitation, the Ministry is implementing employment/self-employment services program to the conflict affected persons and families. This program was successfully piloted in 12 districts with participation of 3,030 beneficiaries. Currently the program is being implemented in 42 additional districts targeting 11,740 beneficiaries. In addition, in order to address the psychosocial needs of the conflict affected persons, the Ministry has recently approved a Guideline on psychosocial counseling, which will be implemented in 10 pilot districts soon. Both these rehabilitation support programs are the part of Emergency Peace Support Project grant-financed by the World Bank.

As the third core function, Ministry is planning and implementing reconstruction of public infrastructures damaged during the conflict. The Ministry has adopted polycentric approach to reconstruction by implementing this program through the already existing institutions- District Development Committees, Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads (DoLIDAR), Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC), and the Nepal Police. Out of more than 5,500 damaged infrastructures, 3,000 have been reconstructed including the district headquarter based buildings, police posts, schools, suspension bridges, Village Development Committee (VDC) buildings and so on. Of these reconstructed infrastructures, police posts are funded through the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) and all other categories of public buildings are funded solely through the Government of Nepal fund.

As we all are aware, soon after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, conflicts arose in many parts of the country, mainly in Terai, owing to issues related to disparities across identity, representation, and access to social services and economic opportunities. To tackle with such conflicts, the Ministry is involved in negotiation and dialogue with the agitating parties, which is its

fourth core function. Till date the Ministry has held negotiation and dialogue with 56 number of agitating parties, out of which 21 are armed groups. In process, 338 number of weapons have been collected from the armed groups.

Support to transitional justice is Ministry's fifth core function. The Ministry drafted the bill on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Disappeared Persons. This was submitted by the cabinet as an ordinance to the President and approved by the President. However, due to issuance of the stay order by the Supreme Court, it is yet to be implemented. Once this process hits of the ground, the present approach of relief and rehabilitation will be replaced by victim-centered reparation approach with due consideration for searching the truth, imparting mercy, and bringing non-pardonable crimes to justice. In the mean time, the Ministry is implementing National Plan of Action on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 targeting the prevention, protection, relief and rehabilitation of women affected by armed conflict. Similarly, it is also implementing National Plan of Action on UNSCR 1612 targeted towards the children affected by armed conflict. As in case of reconstruction, the Ministry has adopted polycentric approach in the execution of these National Plans of Action whereby more than a dozen ministries and entities are acting as implementing agencies.

Post-conflict peacebuilding, as we all agree, can not materialize only by achieving consensus at the central level among few political party leaders. In order to decentralize and democratize peace processes and bring them to the grassroots level, the Ministry has played instrumental role in the formation and running of 75 district level Local Peace Committees (LPCs), 2,660 village level peace committees and 46 number of municipal peace committees. The Ministry provides financial resources and builds capacity of such peace mechanisms and structures, which is the sixth core function of the Ministry. The LPCs have been playing very important role in mediation, negotiation and dialogue at the local level, though their performance varies widely. In order to institutionalize peace-sensitive development approach the Ministry has revived the Peace Focal Persons at central level Ministries and Departments.

Last but not the least, as the seventh major function, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction mobilizes financial resources and technical assistance to support the peace processes through the unique vehicle called Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF). This mechanism is unique because it is fully owned the Government of Nepal, it is a platform for policy dialogue and harmonization with the donors and a forum for innovation in Nepal's peace initiatives. Supported by eight donors- Denmark, European Union, Finland, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United states of America- the NPTF has funded 62 projects till date of which 34 are completed and 28 are

ongoing. For implementation of these projects the NPTF has approved budget of NRs. 22.8 billion of which NRs. 17.7 billion have been disbursed to the implementing agencies. Management of the cantonments of the Maoist Army Combatants, reconstruction of 270 number of police posts, support to the first constituent assembly election, and support to the implementation of national plan of action on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 are some of the flagship projects of the NPTF. For the upcoming CA election, NPTF is funding 7.75 billion Nepali Rupees to the Election Commission.

Having briefed about the core functions of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, let me take this opportunity to mention that the peace processes in Nepal is, in fact non-linear, as it cuts across multiple dimensions of the country including the geopolitics. If we analyze the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, it has clearly stated that Nepal's conflict transformation is multi-dimensional. Our CPA envisages transformations in three major dimensions-political, socio-cultural, and the economic. As we can observe Nepal has achieved a lot in terms of political agenda with the transformation of political landscape from monarchy to republic. Though the root causes of conflict were anticipated to be addressed through writing the constitution by the Constituent Assembly, it could not materialize. However, the issues of identity, representation, and access to social services and economic opportunities have been dealt through amendments in the policy and legislative frameworks. Over the last fifteen year Nepal has become more inclusive and representative with enhanced access of the people to social services and economic opportunities. But the agenda of economic transformation has lagged far behind plagued by adoption of piece-meal and business as usual approaches. Without achieving economic transformation our achievements till date are not going to sustain.

According to the World Development Report 2011 published by the World Bank, post-conflict countries like Nepal should focus on three strategic pillars- jobs, justice, and security. We should also analyze the situation of post-conflict Nepal in these three contexts- where are we in terms of creating quality jobs? Where are we in terms of ensuring justice? What is our security situation? These questions are critical as we analyze our achievements and failures.

## **Conclusion**

As the nation is heading towards new Constituent assembly election, there is need for political consensus to avoid electoral violence. Ours is the country where Lord Buddha- the universal symbol of peace- was borne. So it is the duty of all of us to make peace happen and sustain.

With these few notes, I would like to wish a very successful national seminar on this very important theme. I request the organizers to provide the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction

with the feedback of the seminar so that we could streamline, refine and update our policies in the future.