

**Statement by Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Minister Plenipotentiary,
Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Nepal in New York,
at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, second session
(New York: May 21, 2003)**

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished Delegates,

Nepal is committed to the development and welfare of ethnic and indigenous people. We attach great significance to the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Forum and its recommendations, as emanated from its first session, have been instrumental in raising awareness and uplifting their status worldwide by protecting the rights and promoting the development of ethnic and indigenous communities.

We take immense pride that Nepal is a rich garden of different ethnic groups, languages, religions and cultures. We believe that the development of all groups is crucial for fostering a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious society. In view of this, Nepal has taken a number of general and specific measures to safeguard the interests of various ethnic and indigenous people and to promote their progress.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990, prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste or ideological conviction. Each community has the right to conserve and promote its language, script and culture. Everyone has the freedom to practice his or her traditional religion. We have a multiparty system of democracy that offers space for all to participate in the political process. It also gives room to institute special measures to promote and protect the interest of women, children, the aged, or economically, socially and educationally disadvantaged groups.

Laws, policies and strategies have been put in place to implement these constitutional measures as well as international agreements to which Nepal is a party. We have enacted the Indigenous/Ethnic Advancement National Foundation Act in 2001 to promote and advance social, educational, economic and cultural interests of the target groups and to bring them to national mainstream. A council headed by the Prime Minister and having representatives from each of the 59 ethnic and indigenous groups will guide the work of the Foundation.

Programs were implemented under the 9th plan for the advancement of ethnic and indigenous groups and the 10th plan has continued and strengthened those programs. Providing educational opportunities, health services, access to credit as well as ensuring the protection of traditional knowledge and skills and promotion of useful skills for employment have received priority in government programs. The Government has made provisions for free education up to the primary level, for free textbooks for the disadvantaged groups and girls, and for scholarships to students from indigenous and ethnic groups up to higher studies.

At a time when the Government has been doing its best to develop the country and bring the basic services to people, the violent insurgency over the last six years has caused tremendous loss of life, property and infrastructure. The Government has the obligation to protect people's lives, freedoms, property and public infrastructure. It is unfortunate that one of the NGO delegates speaking in this forum characterized the Government's efforts to prevent violence and provide security to people in a prejudicial and incorrect manner.

My delegation reiterates the full commitment of His Majesty's Government of Nepal to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, including from ethnic and indigenous groups. We call on the international community to help our efforts.

Thank you for your kind attention.