

Statement to the Press

Ian Martin
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

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Much of what I would otherwise want to say today is said in the Report of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to the Security Council, and in my own article published last week in the context of the anniversary of the Janaandolan, and we have copies of both of these here for any of you who have not yet seen them.

UNMIN's central purpose in Nepal is to contribute to the success of a Constituent Assembly election which in turn will contribute to lasting peace. We would have been delighted if it had proved possible to hold such an election before this year's monsoon. In my opinion, postponement should not be viewed as a disaster; but neither is it a guarantee of success at a later date. I hope that a new date will soon be decided upon by the Interim Government, in consultation with the Election Commission, and that the time available will then be used to address the several critical issues that pose risks to the peace process. A peace agenda and timetable, building on the Common Minimum Programme agreed by the eight parties, and supported by civil society and all democratic forces, will help to build and maintain confidence in the peace process.

Let me today highlight three of UNMIN's key concerns.

First, the postponement of the Constituent Assembly election may prolong the period during which Maoist army personnel remain in cantonment sites. This makes it urgent to improve conditions which have repeatedly proved to be unsatisfactory for current weather conditions, and certainly cannot withstand the fast-approaching monsoon. I and my colleagues in UNMIN and the UN agencies have repeatedly insisted upon this and offered our assistance, and we continue to do so.

Second, we have been ready for some weeks to begin the second stage of registration and verification of personnel in the Maoist cantonment sites. This is essential for two purposes: to identify minors who under the agreement must be discharged, and to determine whether personnel were recruited after 25 May 2006, in breach of the ceasefire code of conduct. We have agreed in principle on the form interviews will take. However, the Maoist leadership has not agreed to the process commencing until other issues have been addressed: in particular, the improvement of conditions in the cantonments, government remuneration for those registered there, and the formation of the committee envisaged by Article 146 of the Interim Constitution to take responsibility for the future of the Maoist army. Nevertheless, the obligation on the CPN(M) to allow verification to proceed is unconditional, and I have made clear to the Maoist leadership that UNMIN cannot accept its linkage to any pre-conditions.

Third, I want to refer to UNMIN's mandate to assist in monitoring the ceasefire arrangements, together with OHCHR-Nepal's continuing human rights monitoring. The media regularly reports allegations and denials of breaches of agreements. Such a situation cries out for monitoring which is independent of the political actors themselves, and I repeat my hope that UNMIN's civil affairs officers will soon be able to work with an independent national monitoring body, as well as with the local peace committees to be established as part of the Common Minimum Programme. Progress towards lasting peace and a successful election requires the strengthening of public security. Building confidence in the peace process at the local level through multi-party dialogue with the support of civil society should provide a context in which the Nepal police can enforce the law impartially and with full respect for human rights. All parties must fulfill their commitment to respect the rights of all citizens to participate in public life and political activity freely and without fear.

I leave today for New York today, where I will brief the Security Council on the peace process in Nepal and on UNMIN's activities in support of the process. It is three months since the establishment of UNMIN, and the Secretary-General's first quarterly report will be before the Council. UNMIN personnel currently stands at 311, or about a third of what will be our full staffing. It is growing each week, and currently includes 111 arms monitors, from 26 countries.

Before I take your questions, I would like to emphasise the final words of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in his report to the Security Council: "The process is Nepali-owned. The parties have demonstrated that they are capable of overcoming difficulties when they reach consensus agreements and act with unity of purpose. Maintaining unity of purpose will be essential in the months ahead as the country grapples with the immense challenges of reshaping itself as a peaceful, democratic and inclusive state."