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**PROCEDURES SPECIALES DE LA COMMISSION
DES DROITS DE L'HOMME**

UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF THE COMMISSION ON
HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders
established by the Commission on human rights**

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Women human rights defenders.

International Women's Day Message by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary on the situation of human rights defenders.

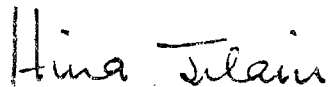
1. I greatly appreciate this initiative undertaken by the Women's Rehabilitation Centre to organize a national consultation on Women Human Rights Defenders in Nepal. I am sure that this consultation has provided an important opportunity for women human rights defenders in Nepal for the discussion of issues facing women human rights defenders in Nepal and the identification of strategies to tackle abuses against women human rights defenders.
2. Women human rights defenders are working tirelessly for the protection and promotion of the human rights of all the world over, and against all odds. In this respect, it is important to emphasize the sheer wealth, diversity and breadth of the human rights work they undertake. Women human rights defenders have been at the forefront of peace movements, of demands for democratic rights, and calling for the respect of all human rights. They have campaigned indefatigably for an end to disappearances, for humane prison conditions, for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and asylum seekers and have protested against widespread impunity for violence against women. As victims themselves of human rights abuses, they have testified in proceedings against the alleged perpetrators. As trade union activists they have championed workers' rights; as lawyers they have been active in seeking redress for victims of human rights abuses and in combating impunity; and they have also organized and campaigned for the rights of human rights defenders. It is a testament to their courage and achievements that this list could go on and on.
3. However, it is also important to highlight the fact that, worldwide, women human rights defenders are paying a heavy toll for their work in protecting and promoting the human rights of others. They have suffered violations of some of the most fundamental rights at the hands of the state as well as non-state entities, including the right to life, to mental and physical integrity, to liberty and security of person, to freedom of expression and association, and to privacy and family life. Some

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have been abducted and made to disappear, others have been raped or otherwise sexually abused. Some women defenders have been forced to flee their homes and countries in fear for their life. In many cases their family members have also come under threat and have suffered harassment, intimidation, beatings, verbal abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention.

4. While all human rights defenders continue to face serious risks, as defenders whose work challenges social structures, economic interests, traditional practices and interpretations of religious precepts women face greater risks, specific to their gender and additional to those faced by men. Also, their professional integrity and standing in society can be threatened and discredited in ways that are specific to them. They are targeted by various social and private actors, such as religious groups and institutions, community or tribal elders, or even members of their own family. They become particularly vulnerable to prejudice, to exclusion and to public repudiation, not only by State forces but by social actors as well when they are engaged in the defence of women's rights. The hostility, harassment and repression women defenders face often take a gender-specific form, ranging from, for example, verbal abuse directed exclusively at women because of their gender, to sexual harassment and rape.

5. Despite the lack of protection and sometimes withdrawal of social support even by their own families and communities, women human rights defenders continue to make their valuable contribution to human rights as part of movements, members of non-government organizations, professionals, survivors of violence and families of victims of violations. Their commitment and courage deserves respect, but above all an urgent attention to address their specific protection needs.



Hina Jilani
Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation
of Human Rights Defenders