

## Speech by the Former Chief Justice of Nepal Ms. Sushil Karki at Amnesty Nepal's 26<sup>th</sup> AGM



Chair of this twenty sixth Annual General Meeting and chair of Amnesty International Nepal Mr. Rajan Prasad Kuikel, other honourable guests seated in the dais, former chairs of Amnesty International Nepal, advisors to Amnesty International Nepal, representatives from various organizations, representatives of various political parties, - and I would like to address Mr. Jerry Bernas, Regional Capacity Building Coordinator of Amnesty International - media persons present here, and other representatives,

Amnesty International which was established in 1961 has now so evolved and developed that there are now over seven million members and supporters affiliated to this organization. Nepal too, embraced this organization quite a long while ago, some fifty years ago from now. The Chair in his speech earlier has mentioned the names of individuals who were involved in establishing this organization in Nepal. And, I recall that I was also a member of this organization in 1987. I also worked for some years being a volunteer for this organization. Some three-four years before that, I was also affiliated with "Human Rights Organization". Now, it has been thirty years I had been member of Amnesty International. There was no such big group then. I am an inhabitant of Biratnagar, but in Biratnagar, there was no Amnesty Group then. We had to come to Kathmandu for Amnesty's activities. Our senior brother Nutan Thapaliya had worked very hard during that time. I am very happy to know that this organization has now blossomed and spread throughout the country being so big with 71 groups.

And, Amnesty International is such an organization - which I will speak on later - but it has become very broad and expansive. I had had a look at the reports of Amnesty Nepal, and I see that its work scope has also widened a lot. If we see at the time when we were active with Amnesty International, it was basically members of one country writing letters and raising awareness by organizing various programmes on situations of human rights violations in other countries. In Nepal, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (the former Prime Minister of Nepal) was declared as a prisoner of conscience and hundreds of thousands of letters from Amnesty supporters from all

over the world came in asking for his release, and that ultimately led to his release from detention. That was one very memorable incident.

Amnesty International opposes persecution of people on the basis of political ideology, persecution while demanding religious freedom, persecution while asking for human rights, and injustice endured by refugees the world over. It has also been working on against death penalty and torture. In addition, it also works for those forcibly disappeared. It has been mentioned previously as well on what this organization specifically is about; it used to work on raising awareness on violations of human rights in other countries rather than one's own through letter-writing or other awareness raising activities. But, I am happy now that I got to see that Amnesty International Nepal has worked on a lot of human rights issues within the country itself.

During my eight and half years' tenure as Justice and Chief Justice, I was never able to focus my attention to the activities of Amnesty because as a Justice I could not be affiliated with any other organization. I was involved with this organization only before that. What makes me very happy now when looking back is that all the friends of Amnesty International Nepal whoever are here, have undertaken and implemented the activities of the "My Body My Right" campaign - a campaign that was active globally from 2014 till 2016 - here in Nepal as well. They have taken the sexual and reproductive rights as a cause of action in this campaign. In addition, the problem of uterine prolapse that we have in our country - and it is even more of a problem in the far-western part of our country with reportedly over 600,000 women suffering from this problem - was another cause of their campaign. This is also a matter of happiness. And, they also have a campaign on the rights of the migrant workers. In addition to such campaigns, Amnesty International has also accorded the facility of in-country research, they have done a research and a campaign in the year 2016 and 2017 on the situations of migrant workers who go for foreign employment, particularly their victimization in the countries of destination including the gulf countries. By doing this they have raised awareness on the ongoing cheating, exploitation and abuses of the migrant workers, and have demanded and advocated for action against the wrongdoers in this case. We had a conflict in Nepal from 1996 till 2006 and Amnesty Nepal is working on for the rights of the people who were forcibly disappeared during that conflict. I see that Amnesty Nepal has taken forward the right to truth, justice and reparation of the victims' families and relatives. Their support on this is appreciable. And I find that they have raised awareness about and campaigned against impunity in Nepal. They also mark the international justice day. Hence, Amnesty Nepal has done a great service for the human rights protection. In our time however, we did not use to do all of this. Now, that Amnesty International pays attention to the in-country human rights problems as well campaigning for their addressal while also campaigning for addressing the human rights concerns in other countries makes Amnesty International unique. This is really a great stuff.

The significant thing currently is that our number has grown now - now there are 71 groups. When 71 groups carefully work throughout the country, there definitely will be some achievement in the country. Speakers have already said - what is true of this world is that political leaders tend to have one language as long as they are not in power but a different one once they reach there. As said by Purushottam Dahal earlier, once the political leaders get hold of the power, their language and tone change. In this world, there never will be a day, a year or a century when incidents and trends of overpowering human rights, overpowering rights of a person, and

committing violence, committing injustice by one onto another and by a group into another group do not occur. The *Raam-Raajya*, the utopian world, that we dream of does not seem to have materialized anywhere in the world so far. While I see, at one time, injustices, violations of human rights and use of forces in one part of the world, I next see the same thing happening in other part of the world. This is seen to happen sometimes in Europe, at other times elsewhere. One group overpowers the other; one class commits injustice upon another; one ruler brings down another ruler; and another serious thing is that, an ethnic race wipes out or exterminates the other race. It goes on like this in this world. It is therefore, in my view, this organization should always be alive; it should always work in a lively fashion; and it should continuously pursue its work of defending human rights. If we look into our own country, we had had conflict at some time and we were overpowered by some dictators at other times.

If we look from an angle on why Amnesty International Nepal came to be in Nepal during my time or even before my time, it becomes clear that it came into Nepal as a protection, as a security shield unto us, during the dictatorial *Panchayati* behaviours of the day when human rights were infringed upon, with the sole belief that if we spoke for the human rights protection or spoke out against the human rights abuses in other countries, they would do the same for the human rights violations we suffered. In my own time, I have come across a number of such incidents and cases (I had encountered these cases while I was working as a lawyer), and I used to write letters and send them across, which would later come out in Amnesty Newsletters. That way, the world could know where injustices were happening. Therefore, it was really a matter of protection and security to be part of Amnesty campaign.

Now, the way the 71 groups, and these many sisters and brothers from place to place, from village to village have got themselves involved in Amnesty campaign, this, in essence, is a strong security shield you are making. The benefit of the unity and togetherness amongst us of this kind is that we will be able to understand that it cannot be ruled out that what may likely come about tomorrow may equally happen right now, that we should not or must not imagine as if the democracy today or the democracy that we will have tomorrow will bring about a *Raam-Raajya*. Anything may happen at any moment. So, all the members and supporters of Amnesty movement should stand as a guard and as a defensive wall to protect, to raise powerful voices, and you should be able to transform yourselves to do that, and you should equally keep sustaining contacts at international level. This will be really superb.

It has been only four months since I have exited from the judiciary. The Chair requested me; and you are doing this programme in a place such as Mahendranagar, the farthest west of the country. I hope those of you who have gathered here from Mechi in the East to the Mahakali in the West will undertake a fruitful discussion, raise novel issues, and make this event meaningful. With this let me finish my speech, and in addition, I wish for the success of this 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.