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Kathmandu, 29 October 2008

Press Statement

The European Parliament's Delegation for relations with South Asia, led by Robert Evans (PSE, UK) visited Nepal from 25 to 29 November in order to hold the 7th EP/Nepal Interparliamentary meeting. The Delegation is grateful to all those, in particular at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission Delegation in Kathmandu, who have helped facilitate the visit in recognition of the very close relations between the EU and Nepal. During its 5 day stay in the country, the Delegation held talks in Kathmandu with President Ram Baran Yadav, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), Constitutional Assembly Speaker Subash Chandra Nemwang, as well as several MPs, Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav and Minister for Defence Ram Bahadur Thapa.

The main aim of the European Parliament's Delegation was to focus on the political situation in the country shortly after the successful Constituent Assembly elections and the formation of the coalition government. In the words of the Chair, "*we are encouraged by the progress and change that have taken place in Nepal in the last 18 months, since our last Delegation visit. The Coalition Government will face many challenges in the months and years ahead.*" The Delegation highlights the importance of a stable government for the consolidation of the overall political process.

The Delegation held extensive talks with Constitutional Assembly Members, and is encouraged by the fact that the new Assembly is the most inclusive body Nepal has ever elected, with much greater representation of the many castes, ethnic groups and regional communities than past parliaments. MEPs can only encourage the continuation of this inclusive process, and hope that the outcome will be a democratic constitution that will fully enshrine the respect of modern political, legal and moral values, as acceptable to the entire nation. Intensive work will however be needed in order to meet the constitutional deadline of 2,5 years; last but not least, for M. Evans, "*the issue of how to address the former Maoists fighters and whether they can be integrated in a smaller Nepali Army remains a key question*". Members also held meetings with civil society in order to better grasp the social problems that Nepal has to face; the situation of street children and child abuse, in and around Kathmandu, was of particular concern to the Delegation, which visited a child care centre in the capital.

The situation of Tibetan refugees in exile in Nepal was also discussed with local community leaders, in view of the official address of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the 4 December plenary seating of the European Parliament, in Brussels. MEPs also tackled the issue of Bhutanese refugees in several meetings and by visiting the Goldhap camp, thus witnessing the beginnings of the voluntary resettlement process and having the opportunity to speak directly with many refugees. The Delegation intends to raise this issue with the Bhutanese authorities, as "*we sincerely hope that Nepal, Bhutan and India, together with the international community, can work together to find some sort of solution to this situation*".

The following Members participated in the working group visit: Robert Evans (PSE, UK), Jaromir Kohlicek (GUE, CS), Philip Bushill-Matthews (EPP/ED, UK), Marianne Mikko (PSE, EE), Jan Masiel (UEN, PL).

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