

Nepal: End crackdown against protestors, respect fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly

(Kathmandu, 25 February 2022) — We, the undersigned human rights organisations, express deep concern over the recent police crackdown on protests in Nepal. On 20 February, demonstrators convened in Kathmandu to protest against the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) tabled in the Federal Parliament of Nepal.

We are gravely alarmed by the police's disproportionate use of force, including water cannons and rubber bullets, against the peaceful protestors.¹ The crackdown on protests are a violation to the freedom of peaceful assembly guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal.² Dozens of protestors and police personnel have been injured as a result.

We are also deeply concerned about the police's increasing proclivity to arrest protestors in a blatant disregard to their constitutional freedoms. At least 35 protestors have been arrested at the recent protest.

In a related protest in September 2021, the police arrested 60 protestors for alleged security concerns.³ The following month, the police arrested woman human rights defender Ruby Khan and thirteen other protestors, 11 of whom were women, at a sit-in protest demanding fair investigations into the death and disappearance of two women.⁴ In April 2021, a group of youth activists demanding climate change reforms in Nepal were arrested by the police.⁵

Similarly, protests against the first and second parliamentary dissolution saw the police using indiscriminate force to disperse protestors and round up over 20 activists, including journalists and human rights defenders.⁶ In 2020, the mass demonstrations against government's mishandling of the pandemic were met with water cannons, batons, and mass detentions in the name of 'maintaining law and order'.⁷

These emblematic cases highlight the State's growing intolerance towards dissent and debate. We remind the Nepali government to respect its peoples' hard-won rights which provide protections against unlawful interference in their fundamental rights to expression, opinion, and peaceful assembly.

We call on the police to exercise utmost restraint while engaging with protestors and under no circumstances, use force against them. We also urge all protestors to ensure the protests are conducted peacefully and do not result in damage of public property nor attacks against security forces deputed by the government.

¹ <https://kathmandupost.com/valley/2022/02/21/anti-mcc-protests-disrupt-road-traffic-in-kathmandu-throughout-the-day>

² Article 17 (a) and (b) of the Constitution of Nepal 2015.

³ <https://kathmandupost.com/valley/2021/09/09/police-arrest-dozens-for-demonstrating-against-the-mcc>

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/18/nepal-police-allegedly-use-excessive-force-protesters-target-activists>;
<https://kathmandupost.com/valley/2021/10/08/police-arrest-13-protesters-from-maitighar>

⁵ <https://thehimalayantimes.com/photo-gallery/in-pictures-youths-hit-the-street-to-declare-climate-emergency>

⁶ <https://kathmandupost.com/visual-stories/2021/07/11/police-arrest-19-protesting-civil-society-members>

⁷ <https://kathmandupost.com/visual-stories/2021/07/11/police-arrest-19-protesting-civil-society-members>

Endorsers:

1. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
2. Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC)
3. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
4. Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYCN)
5. Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Center (KIRDARC)
6. National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice-Nepal (Human Rights Alliance)
7. Youth Action Nepal (YOAC)
8. Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC)

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 85 member organisations across 23 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

For further information, please contact:

- South Asia Programme, FORUM-ASIA, sasia@forum-asia.org

For media inquiries, please contact:

- Communication and Media Programme, FORUM-ASIA, communication@forum-asia.org