Dear Readers,

We would like to dedicate the last issue of our newsletter in 2008 to introduce some of the most important events and changes that shape the cooperation between Nepal and the European Union.

Nepal witnessed a historical moment in its democratic transition, the process that was continuously supported by the international community. The election to the Constituent Assembly was a major cornerstone to build firm democracy and bring prosperity to the nation. The European Commission and all 27 Members States of the European Union remain dedicated to support the transition and the overall peace process.

In our supportive efforts the month of March saw the deployment and official opening of the EU’s Election Observation Mission with its headquarters set up in Kathmandu. Our observer colleagues arriving at different stages of the pre-election period monitored all election-related activities throughout the country under the guidance and supervision of the chief observer, Mr. Jan Mulder, Member of the European Parliament of Dutch nationality. The observation involved monitoring the preparations, polling on election day, counting, tabulation and publication of the results.

In the future the Union will certainly place great emphasis on bilateral cooperation with its partners in third countries. We hereby reiterate our commitments of continuous support to Nepal in its peace process and would once again like to express our friendly sympathy.

As the end of 2008 is around the corner, also do allow me to wish you a very Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Alexander Spachis
Minister Counsellor
Chargé d’Affaires a.i.
Nepal’s key actors unite to better prepare communities for the impacts of natural disasters

In Nepal, an estimated 2.3 million people are vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters which are becoming persistent and more intensive in their cycles due to erratic climate trends. The European Commission’s humanitarian aid department (ECHO) has, in the last five years, channeled over 5.5 million Euros for disaster preparedness (DIPECHO) to implementing partners working with communities across Nepal. Increasing the resilience of people and improving the way villagers prepare for and deal with recurrent natural disasters.

DIPECHO disaster management projects “Has raised our awareness about disaster preparedness. To take precautions before a disaster occurs – this is disaster preparedness” Said 35 year old Shiva Devi Sah from Bazar Tole in the Mahottari District of Nepal where communities are often faced with flooding and fires.

In November 2008, the European Commission (EC) hosted a National Consultation Meeting (NCM); presided by Nepal’s Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Mr. Bam Dev Gautam, and attended by eleven relevant Ministries, the EC’s Head of Delegation, Mr. Alexander Spachis, planning commissions, donors and the EC’s non governmental (NGO), United Nations (UN) and Red Cross/Crescent partners.

The NCM is a national annual event which plans for and identifies funding opportunities for the next 18 months; allows for a dialogue on the upcoming priorities for disaster risk management for Nepal and explores the key lessons learned from past actions. The NCM conclusions were unanimous; stakeholders at all levels agreed to work together to assist communities all over Nepal to better face natural disasters; to replicate what has worked in other areas and to link community based initiatives with the larger developmental agenda of Nepal.
According to Bahadur Mandal, a member of the disaster risk reduction committee in Bazar Tole, before DIPECHO projects “People in Bazar Tole lacked awareness about disaster management, and therefore bore heavy disaster-related losses. However, this project has united the community and given them practical knowledge about disaster preparedness so they are better prepared and able to mitigate the damage caused by hazards.”

Reducing the risks of disasters at the community level involves the coordinated and consistent participation and engagement of communities, Government bodies, NGO’s, international organizations, UN agencies and donors together. Over the past years, with the EC’s disaster preparedness funding, DIPECHO, all actors in Nepal have contributed to the government-endorsed ten year National Disaster Management plan.

DIPECHO partners have been raising the awareness of communities on disaster risk reduction using creative methods such as theatre, written materials and training; improving early warning systems at a local level; building up the skills base of communities to better respond to emergencies and forming local level groups for organizing a response.

Since 2001, the European Commission has given over €45 million in humanitarian aid to address the impact of natural disasters and conflicts as well as disaster mitigation programmes in Nepal.

The European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid department works with over 150 implementing partners in the field including the United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The Commission’s humanitarian aid is channelled impartially to the affected population, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation, supporting projects in more than 60 countries world-wide. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, shelter, medical provisions, water supplies, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine-clearance
“I was forced to be a refugee when I was a foetus in my mother’s womb,” lamented sixteen year old Indra Acharya. “It is very sad to be forced to be a refugee before your birth.”

Indra was born and has lived all his life in one of the seven refugee camps in Nepal’s south eastern Terai districts of Jhapa and Morang. Like tens of thousands of other Bhutanese of Nepali ancestry, Indra’s family was expelled from Bhutan in the early 1990’s and became refugees in Nepal.

For almost two decades, the Bhutanese refugees have been living in Nepal, waiting for a resolution of the crisis that forced them to flee. Sixteen failed bilateral discussions between the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal have meant that generations have been lost with nowhere to go and little to look forward to in the future.

“The young generation is becoming increasingly frustrated because they want jobs and educational opportunities,” said Menuka Nepal, the volunteer camp secretary, “The youth do not want to be confined to the camps longer than is necessary.”

The over 100,000 displaced Bhutanese have no legal access to land or jobs in their host country, Nepal. With no means of cultivating food and limited opportunities for economic alternatives for self sufficiency, the refugees have been entirely dependent on international aid organisations for their survival.

The European Commission has been assisting the refugees for the last seven years, through the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), with almost €26 million for food aid and camp management. The humanitarian assistance has made a practical difference to the refugees’ lives; food, shelter, access to water, health services, education and vocational training, but they remain confined and stateless.
In spite of their uncertain future, many who live in the camps have volunteered their time and skills to better the lives of their communities. Chandra Maya Khatiwada is thirty five years old and has lived almost half of her life as a refugee. She lives with her husband, teenage son and parents in a simple bamboo hut in one of the refugee camps.

One week after her arrival in the camps in Nepal, the nineteen year old Chandra Maya volunteered her medical services in the refugee camps. Between 1993 and 2003, Chandra Maya helped more than five hundred babies into this world. For fifteen years, Chandra Maya has waited for the chance to go back home to Bhutan, but with little hope.

After years, the forgotten Bhutanese refugees saw the possibility of a chance for the future. The United States, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Denmark have offered to resettle nearly 90,000 refugees. Together with her family, Chandra Maya has signed up for resettlement in the United States and is looking forward to a new beginning. However, only half of the refugees have enrolled their interest for a third country resettlement; with some hankering for the chance of repatriation and others wishing to stay in Nepal.

Chandra Bir Thapa is 71 years old and spends much of his time in the camp’s Elderly People’s Recreation Centre, where the refugee men gather daily to read newspapers sing, pray, discuss and keep the memories of Bhutan alive. Chandra Bir’s dream is to be able to return to Bhutan one day. “I will not restrict my other family members [to resettle]; either I will go back to Bhutan – if people are taken back with dignity and respect- or I will stay in Nepal.” He said. “I am too old and my memory is fading, what will I do in a third country without understanding the language there?”

Whatever choices the refugees now have, the solutions have been slow in coming and humanitarian assistance alone will not help without real political will to solve the plight of already lost generations.

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Project updates

Evaluation of the Asia-Link Project

Dr. Alexander SPACHIS met with Mr. Tom DUTSON, Lecturer from National University of Forestry, University of Cumbria on 11.12.08. Mr DUTSON was on mission to Nepal for the final evaluation of European Commission funded “A Management and QA Framework to Support ICT-based Learning in Sustainable Livelihoods in the Himalayan Region”, implemented by the University of the Wolverhampton, United Kingdom. The local partner in Nepal is the Institute of Forestry, Tribhuvan University.

Mr. DUTSON shared briefly on the observations and projects achievements during the meeting. Dr. SPACHIS expressed that such projects provides ground for the development of the country. As there is a huge need of such projects for the development of Nepal, he opined for dissemination of the project results to larger audiences so that donors and other development partner continue for projects of similar nature.

The final “Sharing” workshop on European Commission funded Asia ProEco Projects

The final “sharing” workshop on two urban projects - Integrated Approach Improving Urban Environment in Asia (IUD) and Strengthening Local Capacities in Integrated Sustainable Waste Management in Small and Medium Municipalities of Nepal (ISWM) has been organized by the lead partners Practical Action Nepal along with the European and Asian partners on 11.11.08 in Kathmandu, Nepal. IUD is a regional project being implemented in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, whereas ISWM is being implemented in four small and medium municipalities of Nepal. Both of the projects are funded under the European Commission’s Asia ProEco Programme.

The main objective of the workshop was to share the learning of these two projects to wide range of urban stakeholders, giving forum to international partners, project beneficiaries and local partners to share the outcomes of the project.

The workshop opening has been co-chaired by Mr. Yagya Prasad GUTAM, Secretary, Ministry of the Local Development, Government of Nepal and Dr. Alexander SPACHIS, Chargé d’affaires, Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal. Mr. GAUTAM launched a book on “A Collection of Case Studies from Butwal Western Nepal.” and Dr. SPACHIS launched a book on “Best Practices on Solid Waste Management of Nepalese Cities”. Mr. Achyut LUITEL, Country Director of Practical Action Nepal delivered the welcome speech to the participants.
EU Political Cooperation with Nepal

Chief Observer presented the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission

Following an invitation from the Government of Nepal the European Union established an Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Nepal, which opened on 2 March 2008 and remained in the country till 10 May 2008. The Mission’s mandate was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the election to the Constituent Assembly in accordance with international standards, best practices and the laws of Nepal. The EU EOM was the largest international observation mission with its 120 observers deployed in 62 districts all over the country.

Chief of the EU EOM Mr. Jan Mulder, MEP and Dpty Chief Mr. Thomas Boserup returned to Kathmandu in October for an EOM follow-up visit to present the final report to the President, the Prime Minister and Ministers of the Government of Nepal, to the Election Commission and other stakeholders and interlocutors.

Delivering a press statement at the end of his visit the Chief Observer said “The election was a crucial step towards restoration of representative democracy in Nepal. The overall environment for election met many international standards but not fully in some areas such as the right of freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and freedom of expression. The campaigning environment was tense across the country and there were numerous incidents of violence involving political parties. The role played by party agents and volunteers on election day went sometimes beyond acceptable standards and at times their influence was too great at polling stations. Despite these the people of Nepal turned out in large numbers at polling stations demonstrating support for the return to multiparty democracy and the quota system has guaranteed unprecedented representation of women and marginalised groups.”

7th EP-Nepal Interparliamentary meeting

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. 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 highlighted the importance of a stable government for the consolidation of the overall political process.
Erasmus Mundus Scholarships

Opportunities for higher education in Europe for Nepalese students

Erasmus Mundus offers culturally enriching higher education opportunities for both European and Non-European students. For more information on the Erasmus Mundus scholarships, please check the link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.html

Prospective students from any country are invited to apply to participate in an Erasmus Mundus Masters Course, provided they have obtained a first degree awarded by a higher education institution. For more information and eligibility criteria please check following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/faq/faq3_en.html

Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses are high-quality study programmes at Master’s level offered by a consortium of at least three European higher education institutions. They last between one and two years and lead to the award of a recognised double, joint or multiple degrees. Students have to study in at least two institutions. Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses exist in almost all academic disciplines. An Erasmus Mundus Masters Course normally starts between August and November, depending on the usual starting date of the academic year in the countries concerned.

Under this specific action of Erasmus Mundus app. 1890 graduate students and 420 scholars from third countries will be granted scholarship or stipend respectively. All countries of the world – with the exception of EU Member States, EEA-EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and candidate countries for accession to the EU (Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) – are considered third countries.

Check this link for the list of available Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects/index_en.html

There are no Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses offered at undergraduate or doctorate levels.

IMPORTANT: Please note that Community Action programmes of Erasmus Mundus are vested in the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Please do not apply to the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal or the European Commission.

To learn more please consult our website or contact us:

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