



## Media Release

### ***Nepal becomes free of minefields***

#### ***Kathmandu, 14 June 2011:***

With the explosion of the last remaining landmine in the Phulchowki minefield this afternoon, Nepal has now become only the second county in Asia to be declared free of minefields. The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Jhala Nath Khanal, and the Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Chhatra Man Singh Gurung, each pressed on the switch that detonated the landmines, which were among the 12,070 landmines planted by the Nepal Army during the decade-long armed conflict.

Following the detonation the Senior Technical Advisor of the United Nations Mine Action Team (UNMAT) gave the "Handover Certificate" to the Nepal Army who in turn handed it over to the Chief District Officer of Lalitpur Mr. Ratna Raj Pandey. The certificate confirms that the land has been cleared according to International Standards.

The ceremony to celebrate Nepal's minefield-free status, jointly organized by the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and UNMAT at the top of Phulchowki mountain, was attended by senior officials of the Government of Nepal, representatives from Foreign Missions, International Agencies and civil society partners.

"The clearance of the Phulchowki minefield today by the Nepal Army symbolises the fulfilment of the commitment expressed in the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) and the Agreement on Monitoring and Management of Arms and Armies, to clear all the minefields," said Mr. Shaligram Sharma, Under Secretary, MoPR. "The CPA had stipulated that both sides would assist each other in the marking, defusing, removal and destruction of landmines and booby traps laid during the armed conflict. Accordingly the Maoists Army has also destroyed over 50,000 explosive devices collected in the Maoist Cantonment Sites."

The minefield in Phulchowki is one of the 53 locations throughout the country where landmines were laid by the Nepal Army to protect military installations and physical infrastructure such as communications and hydropower stations. During the decade-long armed conflict, Nepal was contaminated by landmines and other explosive remnants of war which remain as a threat to the safety and security of the communities and continued to maim and kill people even today.

Since the signing of the peace accord, there have been 473 casualties (including 78 deaths) from victim-activated explosions (IEDs, mines and other explosive remnants of war), of which more than half were children. About 5 percent of these cases involved landmines and a majority of the victims were women.

"Victim activated explosions are still occurring, maiming and killing mainly children," said Mr. Will Parks, Representative a.i. of UNICEF. "Thus all of our focus should now be on mine risk education through schools, local peace committees, civil society, and media."

Identification and clearance of the remaining explosive remnants of war (mainly IEDs) across the country is the next challenge for Nepal before it becomes a country free of explosives. Despite a significant decrease in the number of victims, the threat from scattered IEDs from the conflict and those used by current armed groups will continue.

Although Nepal has complied with most of the points stated in the Anti Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), it has yet to sign the Ottawa Treaty. The National Strategy and the National Standards for Mine Action drafted two years ago has also yet to be endorsed by the National Mine Action Steering Committee.

"I urge the Government to remember the victims of explosions these past few years and agree on two words-- **Never Again**," said, Mr. Robert Piper, UN Resident Coordinator. "While we are celebrating the clearance of all minefields in the country, it would be a fitting to translate such words into deeds by fulfilling the last few remaining requirements and signing the Ottawa Land Mine Treaty, and becoming the 157<sup>th</sup> country to commit to the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction."

Mr. Richard Derieux, Senior Technical Advisor, UNMAT hailed the effort of the men and women in blue—the Nepal Army deminers—who have toiled hard these last couple of years to make Nepal the second mine-field free country in Asia.

"Today is a significant and important step for Nepal," said Mr. Derieux. "But Nepal still cannot be declared a country free of landmines for the Nepal Army still has anti-personnel landmines in its stock. It is only when these are also disposed that Nepal can truly become a 'mine free' country."

*UNMAT supported the Nepal Army for the clearance of minefields through capacity development, training, logistical support and quality management activities to improve the effectiveness of the demining operations and to ensure compliance with International Mine Action Standards. The Government of Nepal has taken the lead on mine action by establishing national standards and a dedicated Mine Action Section within MoPR. The Mine Action Joint Working Group has been chaired by MoPR since August 2010 to assist civil society and the government to develop appropriate responses to the country's mine action needs.*

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