

**Statement of Richard A. Boucher
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**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs**

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“Recent Developments in Nepal”

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss recent developments in Nepal. We are at a hopeful moment for the people of Nepal, and the United States is doing our part to help them fulfill their goals of democracy, security and prosperity.

Popular anger at King Gyanendra’s autocratic misrule since February 1, 2005 boiled over in April 2006, resulting in massive demonstrations across the country and broad public support for the nationwide general strike called by Nepal’s seven major political parties. The King’s government responded by arresting demonstrators and political activists, and imposing daily curfews. The security forces’ use of violence against demonstrators resulted in at least 16 deaths and thousands of injuries, but the democracy movement passed every test of its resolve, forcing the King in the end to recognize that the people of Nepal would not rest until their sovereignty was restored. On April 24, the King bowed to public pressure and announced the reinstatement of Parliament. On April 28, Parliament convened for the first time since 2002, with G.P. Koirala of the Nepali Congress Party at the helm of a new government of national unity.

I traveled to Nepal earlier this month to underscore U.S. support for the new government and to evaluate the political situation firsthand. I found political party leaders with a renewed commitment to stay united as they work to improve their country; an army that is committed to serving a new, democratic, civilian government; civil society leaders intent on ensuring the new government makes good on its promises; and a public that for the first time in years seems optimistic about the rewards democracy can bring to Nepal, and an interest in pushing their leaders to deliver. We share that optimism, and will support the people of Nepal as they work to build a more peaceful and prosperous future for their country. We expect that there will

be a limited opportunity for peace to take root in Nepal. Expectations are very high. It is imperative that we use available assistance funding to get visible evidence of development projects up and running as quickly as possible in rural areas where government has been virtually absent for years.

Our significant assistance program for Nepal was recently updated to focus on democracy, governance, and conflict mitigation programs. Our development and economic assistance is already meeting some acute needs of the Nepalese people and their new government. In FY 2006 alone, U.S. assistance is strengthening the Election Commission, Peace Secretariat, National Human Rights Commission, and corruption ombudsman; broadening participation in political parties and making them internally more democratic, thereby increasing public participation in the democratic process; and supporting the work of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are exploring ways, depending on available resources and the evolution of the peace process and political situation, to strengthen democracy and the protection of human rights in Nepal, and to help the government deliver services to the people. We have a team in Nepal this week to assess where our assistance would have the greatest immediate impact. Areas in which we feel we can make a positive difference include strengthening political parties, expanding rural projects, providing technical assistance and equipment to the Parliament and to a constitutional reform process, assisting reintegration of internally displaced persons, and supporting elections. We also stand ready to provide assistance to security forces if requested by the new government; I told Prime Minister Koirala the same when I met him on May 2. This offer includes a commitment to continue training programs that improve the human rights record of Nepalese security forces. We also support the new government's efforts to bring peace to Nepal after a decade of devastating internal conflict that has cost over 13,000 lives and untold suffering.

Following the King's seizure of civilian authority, his estrangement from the political parties led the parties to seek a rapprochement with Nepal's Maoist insurgents, based on their mutual rejection of the King's power grab. This rapprochement, and the negotiations that accompanied it, resulted in a "12-Point Understanding" between the parties and the Maoists that continues to serve as a roadmap for relations between them. The key element of this understanding is a commitment by the parties (now the

government) to support elections to a constituent assembly charged with drafting a new constitution – a longstanding Maoist demand – in exchange for Maoist commitment to support multi-party democracy.

This new relationship between the parties and the Maoists has led to important progress toward peace, including the current reciprocal cease-fire, but their engagement is not without serious risks. We and many in Nepal and in the international community remain wary of Maoist intentions. They instigated a brutal insurgency and are responsible for countless human rights abuses. To date, they have not renounced violence nor have they agreed to disarm; their rhetoric remains belligerent, including against the United States. Despite stated Maoist commitments to the cease-fire and to multi-party democracy writ large, Maoist human rights abuses, including kidnappings and extortion, continue. It is important to remember that the Maoists took up arms in 1996 against an elected government and multi-party democracy.

We hope that the Maoists' commitment to peace and multi-party democracy is genuine. However, based on their track record they have not earned the benefit of the doubt. They need to be judged by their actions. If they renounce violence and respect human rights, there is a place for them in Nepal's political arena. However, until they take those steps and take them irrevocably, we along with many others in Nepal and elsewhere will not be convinced that they have abandoned their stated goal of establishing a one-party, authoritarian state.

The international community has an important role to play in ensuring Nepal's democratic gains are lasting. As I mentioned earlier, we have already taken steps to focus our assistance program on strengthening democracy and governance, as well as the protection of human rights. We hope that other donor governments, some of which withdrew or reduced assistance during the period of royal misrule or usurpation of power, will also focus on strengthening capacity for democratic governance as they evaluate how best to support Nepal. We look forward to working with international partners to help support the people of Nepal in their quest for a brighter future. Among those partners, India has a key role to play. The ties that bind India and Nepal – economic, cultural, historical – are as strong as those between any two countries. Those ties mean that the two countries are deeply vested in each other's success and are intimately familiar with each

other. For these reasons, we place high priority on consulting closely with India on Nepal policy.

We took note of the May 12 arrests of five people who served as ministers in the King's cabinet. The integrity of a justice process is determined by its transparency and grounding in the rule of law, so the government should take care to ensure those principles are followed to the utmost.

Nepal's future is in the hands of its people and its political leaders must take steps to meet the people's aspirations. We have no interest in prescribing the architecture of their democracy. The United States stands behind the people's right to make that choice themselves through a free and fair political process, and will stand against any who attempt to deny them the freedom that is their right.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I would be happy to take your questions.