

UN: ELECTION PROCESS IN NEPAL IN 'GOOD SHAPE' - UN POLITICAL CHIEF:
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UNITED NATIONS - 20 August 2007 – The top United Nations political official today, having just returned from Nepal, hailed the preparations for upcoming elections in the Himalayan nation and urged all political parties to ensure that the process remains on track.

“We’re getting all of the pieces of the election together. I think it’s in good shape, and the real question now is everybody having the will to make it happen,” Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe said at a press briefing in New York.

Mr. Pascoe described as “incredible” the process under way to prepare for the Constituent Assembly elections scheduled for 22 November in Nepal, where a decade-long armed conflict that killed some 13,000 people came to a formal end when the Government and the Maoists signed a peace accord late last year.

The polls were to have been held in mid-June but had to be postponed due to technical problems and the onset of the monsoon season. Mr. Pascoe underlined the importance of an open, fair and transparent election taking place on time.

While in Nepal’s capital over the weekend, the Under-Secretary-General met with Prime Minister G. P. Koirala, other major political party leaders, the Foreign Minister, and a number of senior Government officials, including the Chief Election Commissioner.

In addition, he met with civil society leaders, as well as staff of the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) led by Ian Martin, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in the country. A special political mission established in January this year, UNMIN is assisting with the follow-up to the landmark Nepalese peace deal reached in November 2006, and also supporting the holding of the upcoming elections.

Asked today about the country’s truth and reconciliation process and the possibility of amnesty for ex-combatants, Mr. Pascoe noted that UNMIN’s human rights section has been discussing the issue with the Government, in particular “what the international community sees as acceptable” in that regard.

He added that much more discussions are needed, particularly with civil society, before any decision on amnesty can be arrived at. “I think they’re well short of that part of the process yet,” he stated, adding “I said when I was there that we don’t believe people should be able to have impunity for crimes. We’ll see how this process goes. We’re in a dialogue with them on this issue.”

In a related development, UNMIN today launched a 15-minute magazine-style radio programme known as UNMIN Ko Boli, to reach out to communities across the country to increase awareness on what the Mission and the UN Country Team is doing to support Nepal’s peace process.

The twice-a-week programme, produced in partnership with Nepal’s public broadcaster, Radio Nepal, will air in the Nepali language initially, and within weeks it will also be broadcast in five other Nepalese languages.

Prior to arriving in Nepal, Mr. Pascoe was in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, where he attended the Seventh Summit of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – a regional body comprising China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and also held meetings with several Central Asian leaders.

Among the issues discussed at the summit were the UN’s relations with regional organizations, as well as cooperation to tackle the primary problems affecting the region, including drugs, water and counter-terrorism. Participants also welcomed plans to open a UN regional office for Central Asia later this year in Turkmenistan’s capital, Ashkhabad.

On his way to the region, Mr. Pascoe conducted two days of talks with Chinese Foreign Ministry officials in Beijing, touching on issues including Darfur, the Middle East peace process, Nepal, Myanmar, Kosovo and the Korean Peninsula, as well as cooperation between China and the UN in Africa.