

Civil Society and The Geneva Declaration

Shobha Shrestha, South Asia Partnership-Nepal

Thank you, Mr. Chair

The world is celebrating the second anniversary of the *Geneva Declaration on Armed violence and Development* highlighting the critical role that states and civil society should play in preventing and reducing armed violence.

The Declaration recognises “the important role civil society has to play in reducing armed violence” and it encourages states to “promote active partnerships between governments, international organisations and civil society.”

Civil Society organisations participated in the 2006 Summit and in all the subsequent regional meetings on armed violence and development.

One of the main goals contained in the *Geneva Declaration* is the measurable reduction of armed violence by 2015. For my colleagues and me in Nepal, our experiences and connection with the grassroots have made us realise that we must achieve this goal – there is no alternative.

Let me tell you why. Nepal faced a severe armed violence for more than a decade, led by CPM Maoists groups in 1996, who were fighting against discrimination, marginalization and injustice by the government controlled by former King Gyanendra.

The armed violence resulted in the killings of thousands of people, thousands more were injured, abducted, detained, tortured and displaced.

- Development infrastructures were destroyed, public services were withdrawn, human rights were violated and development activities were completely disrupted.
- The health clinic and telecommunications stopped functioning.
- The education system was hampered as the students were abducted and teachers killed.
- Restrictions on mobility hampered the supply of food and medicine.
- Innocent citizens were deprived of getting their basic rights and services.

The pain and suffering of my people made us responsible to fight for peace and development.

Therefore, civil society got organised and started initiatives to pressure the government, the political parties and the Maoists to stop the armed violence -- because the innocent citizens could no longer bear the costs of increasing militarisation.

Civil society started pressuring the parties responsible for armed violence to participate in a non violent movement and to restore peace and development in the country.

You may think what I am describing now sounds easy, but, believe me, it was not.

We believe that through commitment, dedication and organisation of the civil society nothing is impossible.

Therefore, by hard work and continued patience we were able to convince the Maoists and the political to stop the armed violence. In fact, they even invited us to join their non violent movement.

The non violent movement succeeded in bringing back the people’s rights from the autocratic rule.

In the same year, the UN launched the Geneva Declaration and civil society in Nepal welcomed it, since the Declaration embodied the principles that we have always believed in.

I am pleased to say that this year in 2008 our government has finally recognised the contribution of civil society and signed the Geneva declaration, becoming one of the more than 100 signatories.

Our experience shows that a partnership between civil society and governments is necessary to achieve a sustainable peace and to reduce armed violence.

We are here to support you – we just need your commitment.