

Press Release

City of Houston Celebrates Nepal Day to Honor Non Resident Nepalis

A declaration of May 28 as “**Nepal Day**” by Mayor Annise Parker, of Houston, Texas (USA), was made to commemorate the three-day long 4th Regional Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) Conference just concluded at the Westchase Marriot Hotel, in Houston on May 27-30, 2010. In the traditions of past regional conferences in Qatar, Germany and Thailand, it was a matter of pride for North American NRN to host this conference and very appropriately, it was during the time when Asian-American Heritage Month is observed nationwide in the USA.

The conference welcomed over 350 attendees from 20 countries around the world to deliberate on their potential, as Nepalis living outside Nepal, to help the motherland develop her economy, education and democracy as well as to support the enabling NRN demand for dual citizenship. Ambassadors of Nepal to the US – HE Shankar P. Sharma, UN – HE Gyan Chandra Acharya, Chancellor and President of the University of Houston Prof. Renu Khator and Dr. Frits Pannekoek, President, ICDE and Athabasca University, Dr. Mohamed Ally, Program Director of Athabasca University, and Provost Carl Stokton and Vice President Dr. Mrinal Mugdh both of University of Houston as well as the NRNA leaders and many accomplished NRN worldwide graced the meeting. Other participants included businessmen and professionals from Nepal.

Welcoming the delegates on May 29th. Coordinator Ratan Jha, General Secretary of NRNA-ICC, thanked Houston volunteers who made the Conference a success and recognizing Dr. Upendra Mahato’s recent distinguished service award from the President of Nepal. HE Gyan Chandra Acharya lauded the NRN for their meaningful slogan and their promotion of Nepal worldwide. Representatives of Senator Hutchinson of Texas, The Greater Houston Partnership and Worldwide Partners, a consulting firm, welcomed the delegates to Texas. Remarks were made by Dr. Ambika Adhikari, NRNA Regional Coordinator for Americas, Suman Timsina, President of NRN NCC of USA, Naba Gurung President of NRN Canada and other organizational representatives on the role and responsibilities of NRN in aiding Nepal as well as welcoming visitors to the US. On behalf of local hosts Dr. Rajendra Shrestha welcomed all the participants and guests. President of Nepal Society of Texas, Dr. Prem Adhikari, appealed everyone to get engaged in preserving and promoting language and culture of Nepal and pass it on to the next generation. Dr Upendra Mahato made an inspirational address on what should motivate NRN and how they should work to help Nepal. Dev Man Hirachan, President of NRN-ICC spoke of how Nepal could and should become a land of opportunity despite its current challenges in the political sphere. HE Shankar Sharma noted the importance of NRN in the economy of Nepal and how they could enhance their efforts by being more active in their local governments. He iterated on the favorable investment climate and noted the recent improving development indicators in Nepal. Anjan Shrestha

delivered the vote of thanks, noting again the great efforts of local volunteers and lauding the long voyages made by some to attend the meeting. Ms Shristi Shrestha moderated the inaugural program.

A session, moderated by Dr. Ambika Adhikari, NRNA Regional Coordinator - North American, was devoted to dual citizenship for NRN, the progress, hurdles and prospects. Capt. Hitman Gurung, Regional Coordinator – Europe, spoke in some detail of the Gurkha perspective and pointed out deficiencies in the proposed constitutional provision and how the NRNA position paper suggests solutions in a win-win manner. Other speakers delivered various perspectives on the issue. It was generally agreed that the NRN Card being implemented could coexist with dual citizenship, which would be one of the major goals of the organization.

An all-day session on Friday the 28th focused on distance education and science and technology exchange between Nepal and the diaspora. The concept is an Open University in Nepal, led by Dr. Pramod Dhakal, which is proposed as a collaboration between NRNA and Canada Foundation for Nepal to support the Government of Nepal in establishing it. The workshop, organized by the NRN Skills, Knowledge and Innovation Exchange Task Force in multiple sessions, was to discuss a proposal for the institution, its content and academic development, governance, management, administration and a business plan. The keynote address, delivered by Dr. Pannekoek dwelt on the lessons from his decades of experience in the field. He noted the pressing need for such institutions in a developing economy like that of Nepal. Like Dr. Khator, he remarked on the transformative nature of an open university and the importance of quality parity with the bricks-and-mortar institutions.

The concept of collective investment was discussed in two sessions exploring the potential of Nepal, sizes, scope, structures and challenges. Entrepreneurs, executives and potential investors discussed ways to leverage their assets and gain negotiating advantages. Suman Timsina laid down the foundation by appealing NRNs to play an important role as a professional to introduce Nepal to their companies and help build relationships. The session also focused on challenges and success associated with those returning or investing their skills, knowledge and money in Nepal. Investment included not just monetary but skills and knowledge as well. An executive of energy companies Mr. Arun Baskota spoke on how a better planned collaborative efforts can be done with hydro power and other energy sector. Kiran Joshi, owner of a successful world-class animation studio in Nepal, demonstrated his work and touched on what would be needed for NRN to develop collaborative businesses. Rameshwar Shah focused on collective investment strategies to include low-income NRN. Niley Shrestha talked on how the proposed \$100 million fund could be implemented soon. Ganesh Pokhrel described a co-operative NRN investment farm in Russia. Various forms of investment were proposed as models for illustration. Mr. Anjan Shrestha and Bhuwan Gurung talked about a model

to build entrepreneurship among local Nepalis. Dr. Mahato laid down a challenge to NRN to collect funds promising to help.

On Friday, there was an overview of select charity programs in Nepal with NRN involvement, highlighting how individual NRN initiatives have made a substantial philanthropic impact. Evidence of increasing institutionalization in these efforts and the resulting multiplicative beneficial effects were welcomed. The need for information collection and coordination of these efforts by an organization, like NRNA, was noted. Kripali Gautam, Padam Sharma, Niley Shrestha, Nnaresh Koirala, and Anup Neupane presented wide variety of projects from model village, library, room to read, scholarship and various other projects.

Women's issues and the vital role of women leaders in social justice all over the world in numerous settings were discussed in a session by the Global Nepali Women Forum. These issues have become a prominent concern as the numbers of NRN increase worldwide. Dr. Bidya Ranjeet moderated a very diversified panel with Luna Ranjeet, Bishnu PAriyar, Radha Basnyat, Aashm Rana, Indra Ban and Seema Dhimi. A very diverse panel considered women's empowerment and related issues. A productive discussion on building a better consortium of Nepali women worldwide was engaged in by participants from US, Australia, Nepal and Canada.

Kathmandu has been identified as a highly vulnerable location to a major earthquake and NRN have geared up to assemble a team of medical, information technology, engineering and other professionals to develop an earthquake response and disaster relief strategy. The American Society of Nepalese Engineers along with America Nepal Medical Foundation and Computer Association of Nepal-USA jointly conducted a panel discussion on earthquake preparedness. NRN USA President Suman Timsina pledged support for this cause exhorting the entire global NRN network to join in. NRNICC's SKIE Task Force will work with ongoing efforts in North America to create mobilize professionals and others globally.

Everest Day (May 29th) was marked by a session on 'Nepal Tourism Promotion', which was attended by several Mount Everest summiteers. The first couple to get married atop Everest, Prem Dorji Sherpa and Ms. Moni Mulepati, shared their experiences and called on NRN to promote Nepal. Panelists described how Nepal is a great destination for tourists and proposed ways to help tourism. Some explained how keeping Nepali heritage and culture alive in foreign lands would help this cause. The Nepal Promotion Task Force of NRNA announced a project to build the largest brass statue of the Buddha in Lumbini. NRN were encouraged to pressure the Government of Nepal to restore stability to Nepal to encourage tourism.

A Nepali Literary Festival focused on Nepali poetry originating mostly from outside Nepal indicated the depth of residual feelings of NRN for Nepal. Mr. Homnath Subedi, Mr. Jiba Lamichane, Prof. Shiv Gautam, Mr. Bhim Karki and other spoke on the role of NRNA in preserving and promoting Nepali language and literature. Mr. Suman Timsina informed that a relationship has been established to teach Nepali language and literature in Nepali diaspora and a provision of research at Tribhuwan University in under discussion. He also informed that a DDiaspora Study Room will be dedicated at Nepali department at Tribhuwan University in collaboration with INLS and NRNNCC of USA. Books of Ganga Ligal and Hasta Gautam were also released. Particiaption in competitive and non-competitive poetry recital was very encouraging. Gokul Bhandari. Hasta Gautam and Gautam Dahal were placed first, second and third. Mr. Basu Sharma moderated the session.

Presentations were made by Regional Coordinators or their representatives, covering the various NRNA Regions. These covered accomplishments, highlights, recent developments, challenges for NRNA, prospects and future directions for NRN activities.

A memorable cultural event included dances by local artists from Texas and Australia. A prize of \$1000.00 sponsored by Hem Sarita Foundation of Texas was given to child artist and was awarded to Astha Oli of Australia for the first, Sony Pathak and Shristi Dahal Second and Priyanka Sharma, Shrijana Kharel and Prisa Rana for the third place. Mr. Premraja Mahat, Ms. Sapna Shree, Ms. Tara Gurung entertained the audience with their songs while Mr. Manoj Gajurel entertained with his brilliant comic presentation.

The conference concluded with the formal reading of the “Declaration”, the 14 resolutions summarizing the result of the deliberations. They called upon the political leadership in Nepal to complete, by the extended deadline, the drafting of the new constitution; a strong call to adopt the suggestions of NRNA on dual citizenship and the NRN ID Card. Further, NRNA pledged to continue its cultural heritage maintenance, charitable, tourism promotion, investment, women’s rights and development efforts on behalf of Nepal and stressed its new initiatives like the Open University. Finally, it thanked the City of Houston and its Mayor for extending a warm welcome and the declaration of Nepal Day.

The evenings were capped off with hosted dinners hosted, on Saturday, by the Nepalese Association of Houston followed by a cultural program featuring prominent Nepali talent and on Sunday, by the Grisham & Jha Group at the Historic George Ranch. The Conference was co-sponsored by several business houses and some 50 US-Nepali organizations. It is expected to revitalize the NRNA slogan "For Nepali By Nepali". More information can be found at <http://nrnusa.org>. The conference was locally hosted by Nepali Association of Houston (NAH) with the support of over 50 organizations in USA.

NRNNCC of USA also recognized a number of key individuals for their accomplishments and contribution to community with a plaque. The list includes:

1. Mr. Prabal Gurung for bringing Nepal into Spotlight through exceptional accomplishments in the field of Fashion Design
2. Dr. Prahlad Pant (GA) for Community Service
3. Prof Shiv Gautam (MA) for an exceptional academic accomplishment
4. Prof Alok Bohara (NM) for Exceptional Academic Commitments to Nepal
5. Dr. Bidya Ranjeet (CT) for Exceptional Leadership in Mobilizing Community
6. Mr. Veda B Joshi (CA) for Generosity and Philanthropic Commitments
7. Mr. Karma G Sherpa (NY) for Community Leadership
8. Ms. Kripali Gautam (TN) for Charitable work and love to Nepal
9. Ms. Bhabika Joshi (TX) for Exceptional Accomplishment as a Young Writer
10. Mr. Premraja Mahat (MD) for Promoting Nepali Culture in Diaspora
11. Ms. Tara Gurung (CA) for Entrepreneurship and Nepali Culture Promotion
12. Mr. Sunny Kantha (MO) for Significant Accomplishment as a BOT of Duke University
13. Mr. Narayan Gurung (OR) for his accomplishments in the field of Tae-Kwan-Do
14. Ms. Ashmi Rana (Nepal) for a successful accomplishment as woman entrepreneur
15. Mr. Bishudev Mahato (MA) for significant accomplishment as a Young Scholar at Harvard University

In addition Past Presidents Dr. Jeetendra Joshee, Dr. Gaury Adhikari and Dr. Tara Niraula were also recognized for their contribution to strengthen NRN Association in the USA. Organizing committee also recognized a number of volunteers for their contributions.

NRN ICC business meeting took place on third day as well as a general body meeting of NRN NCC of USA. NRNNCC of USA discussed their amended bylaws and endorsed from the floor with few recommendations to be presented to Board. The General Body Meeting of NRN National Coordination Council also recommended to host next annual meeting at New York during Memorial Day Weekend (Last weekend of May), 2011.

Drafted by
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