

A Day in Nuwakot: Beyond the Floodwaters

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Yesterday, I travelled to Nuwakot to see firsthand the devastation caused by the recent floods and, particularly, to understand what the disaster means for women and girls—their safety, dignity and immediate needs.

What I saw will stay with me for a long time.

The scale of destruction is difficult to comprehend. Homes, roads, bridges and livelihoods have been swept away. Standing close to the devastated areas, I found myself thinking not only about what had been lost, but about how long it will take to rebuild.



The truth is, **the crisis will not end when the floodwaters recede. Recovery and reconstruction will take years.**

When warnings are not enough

Even while we were there, we heard people shouting that the river was rising again and warning everyone to move away.

Yet some people around us responded almost casually: *“The river always rises like this. There is no need to hurry.”*

It was a chilling reminder of what may have happened when the disaster struck—that warnings may have been heard but not taken seriously enough. Technology and information alone cannot save lives.

Warnings must reach communities in time, people must trust them, understand them and, most importantly, act on them.

This is a lesson we must take seriously as climate-related disasters become more frequent and unpredictable.

Relief is available—but is it reaching everyone?

I met the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and their team, as well as the Chair of the District Coordination Committee. The message was reassuring: **there is no immediate shortage of relief materials.** The bigger challenge is making sure that these materials reach the people who need them—quickly, efficiently and equitably.

The initial delays caused by the “one-door” approach to relief distribution have eased, and local authorities and communities are now playing a much stronger role. What is urgently needed is better coordination, management and a distribution system that reaches every affected family, particularly those who are hardest to reach.

Disasters demand more than goodwill. They require **coordination, clear responsibilities, effective information systems and last-mile delivery**, particularly for people who are most vulnerable or difficult to reach.

What about the safety of women and girls?

My deepest concern came from visiting holding centres.

At first glance, some appeared relatively clean and orderly. Children were playing with toys. Others were absorbed in their mobile phones, perhaps finding a small escape from the reality around them.

But looking more closely raised difficult questions.

Men, women, boys and girls of all ages were staying together. There was inadequate privacy for women to change, concerns around sanitation and menstrual hygiene, and a clear need for psychosocial counselling.

I was also concerned to see that access and security in most centres appeared to be controlled by male authorities, with no visible women involved in security or protection.

In a disaster, safety cannot simply mean keeping people physically alive. Safety must also mean protecting their dignity and their right to be free from violence and exploitation.

Displaced women and girls can face heightened risks of gender-based violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation. These risks do not disappear because there is a humanitarian emergency. In fact, vulnerability can increase.

That is why we urgently need **safe, women- and child-friendly spaces** where women and children can access privacy, information, psychosocial support, hygiene facilities, protection services and referrals.

We learnt this lesson during the earthquake response. **We should not have to learn it again after every disaster.**

The smell of death—and the resilience of life

At the Army camp, helicopters were standing ready for rescue operations and to transport relief materials.

The smell of dead bodies was overwhelming.

Yet amid this devastation, people continued their work with remarkable resilience. There was a quiet determination to keep going. Nearby, free food centres were serving people—another powerful reminder of the solidarity and generosity that emerges in times of crisis.

Then I saw the wall covered with photographs and notices of **hundreds of missing people.**

That was perhaps the most painful sight of all.

Behind every photograph is a person. Behind every missing person is a family waiting, searching, hoping and grieving.

Some families who had lost their loved ones were there. Around them, national and international media were documenting the tragedy.

But I could not help wondering: **what happens when the cameras leave?**

The people of Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Dhading will still be there. They will still need support. They will still be rebuilding their homes, their livelihoods and their lives.

Time to work together

I also met civil society organisations, particularly those working with women and girls.

We shared our experiences, concerns and pain.

One message was particularly clear to me:

This is not a time for duplication, recognition or who does what. This is a time to share our knowledge, resources and expertise and work collectively.

Government, local authorities, civil society, communities, security forces and humanitarian organisations all have a role to play. And what I saw was a genuine goodwill and willingness to help.

What is needed now is to turn that willingness into **coordinated, accountable and gender-responsive action.**

What must happen now?

We need to ensure:

- Relief reaches every affected family **quickly and equitably.**
- Women and children have access to **safe and dignified spaces.**
- Women are meaningfully involved in **relief, protection, security and decision-making.**
- Psychosocial support is available to survivors, children and grieving families.
- Early-warning systems are strengthened, with communities prepared to **act on warnings.**
- Protection measures address the risks of **gender-based violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation.**
- And, above all, there is a **long-term plan for rehabilitation, livelihoods, reintegration and reconstruction.**

The floods may have destroyed homes, roads, bridges and livelihoods.

Our response must not allow them to destroy dignity, safety and hope.

The floodwaters will eventually recede. But our responsibility does not end there.

Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Dhading need more than relief. They need a sustained commitment to rebuild lives—with **dignity, safety, resilience and hope.**