

Kathmandu, Nepal
June 1, 2015

Dear friends,

“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” Deut.33.26&27

It is now over a month since Nepal experienced ‘the great earthquake’. You may remember that on April 25, an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale struck, with an epicenter in Gorkha district, northwest of Kathmandu. Its effect spread east and south, rippling through the Kathmandu valley and surrounding districts, with devastating avalanches in the Langtang and Everest Himalayas. The worst-affected district was Sindupalchowk, northeast of Kathmandu, where more than 90% of houses in the small towns and rural villages were destroyed. The death toll from this first earthquake was about 8,000.

Amongst the frequent strong aftershocks was a further earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on May 12th. This time the epicenter was northeast of Kathmandu, and it brought significant destruction to the district of Dolakha, which neighbours Sindupalchowk. In Dolakha many houses damaged in the initial earthquake were brought completely down, but the death toll was much less because so many people were already living outside in tents.

Throughout this time, many of you have been in touch with us to express your concern and to encourage us. Thank you for all your support and prayers. This is a brief update of the situation now that Nepal has dropped off the international media’s agenda!

Life in Kathmandu is returning to normal, a process has taken an important step forward with the reopening of local schools, albeit many in ‘temporary learning centres’. Unfortunately, the frequent aftershocks, particularly the May 12 earthquake, frightened many residents so that they no longer trusted that the worst was over, and further delayed returning to their homes and workplaces. In fact, just 10% of buildings in Kathmandu collapsed or need demolishing, and so residents who continue to live in tents are a significant number, but definitely a minority. Three very distinct areas in the city suffered the most destruction and deaths, and here dangerous buildings have been marked with red paint or ribbons, propped up with anything from steel scaffold to strong bamboo poles, and are being dismantled by hand to recover as much of the building materials as possible. Beyond these areas, the small piles of rubble, the holes in the road to repair water pipes, and the labourers patching broken walls don’t look so out-of-place in a city that is always somewhat dusty and disheveled. Hospitals in the city have coped well with the medical emergency and, with a little help from some foreign teams, were able to deal efficiently with both local injuries and critical cases referred from surrounding districts. The government has announced compensation for those made homeless as well as authorizing low interest loans for rebuilding, although many are concerned about how to access these facilities. These measures also do not address the needs of the many poor tenants whose shoddy housing collapsed and who are now struggling to find cheap rooms as landlords dramatically increase rents.

Out in surrounding rural areas, both within the Kathmandu valley and beyond to the worst-affected districts, the situation is much more severe. Frequently whole villages have collapsed as the traditional mud-and-brick 2-to-3 storey houses were literally shaken apart. Aftershocks have led to deadly landslides, including one on May 12 which wiped out an aid convoy and a village in Dolakha where our church has a daughter fellowship. Relief agencies

continue to struggle to get aid to the most remote villages, but in many communities emergency supplies and shelter have now been delivered. The courage and resilience of Nepalis, sadly earned through a history of floods and landslides, can be seen as families deal with the dead and then patiently begin the enormous task of rebuilding their lives, recovering what they can from the debris and starting to construct shelters from wood frames and tin sheeting. The race is on now to ensure that communities have adequate protection before the monsoon rains arrive mid-June, and also that they are secure enough and have sufficient seed to be able to go out and plant their rice paddies at that time. A longer-term effort is underway to address such areas as sanitation, nutrition, child protection and gender-based violence, chronic issues that are of even greater concern in stressed and displaced communities.

We ourselves are living very normal routines at present: our home has just a few superficial cracks, our boys are back at school, and Mark and I are going to work as usual. Neither of our organizations has expertise in relief work, nor do we have close ties to the worst-affected districts, so on the whole we are carrying on with the chronic challenges related to improving health care and nutrition status for communities throughout the country. The one exception to this is that NSI does have a relationship with Dolakha district hospital in Jiri, which suffered major damage to almost every building in the May 12 earthquake. NSI will be developing plans with the hospital to support their long-term reconstruction. Coincidentally, NPCCS carried out a small nutrition training project in the Jiri area some years ago, and we are now hoping to deliver some supplementary nutrition packages to those communities over the monsoon months.

As a family, we feel we are managing the stress of the last month reasonably well. Certainly we have not endured any significant difficulty, although have Nepali friends who have lost family members or are trying to work out new accommodation. Mainly we have had to deal with a greater level of uncertainty and a more disrupted routine than usual. We do feel a bit tired, but that is normal for this time of year, as the heat and humidity increase rapidly before the monsoon rains, the school year draws to a close, and many expatriate friends leave Nepal either permanently or temporarily for the summer. We are thankful for your prayers that have given us strength and peace throughout this time, and also for a wonderful gift from friends to take a break and visit them for their daughter's wedding next week.

We of course continue to ask for your prayers for Nepal: for wisdom and integrity in the entire process of distributing aid and planning longer-term reconstruction, that the poorest and most marginalized groups will not be overlooked as they so often are. Please also pray that God's hand would be over the weather: adequate and timely rains are needed across the country for good rice production, but communities are more vulnerable than ever to floods and landslides this season.

With continued appreciation for your support,

Deirdre, Mark, Zachary and Benjamin.