

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enkhuizen, Holland, November 2009

We are very pleased that this year's International Cerebral Palsy Symposium is being held here in Utrecht. Although we are a long way away from Nepal geographically, this symposium gives us an opportunity to show our enthusiastic support for ICPS.

Who are 'we'?

We are the people from the Foundation “Holland Building” Nepal. Together with a number of other international western foundations, we support the Self-help Group for Cerebral Palsy in Kathmandu, Nepal.

For almost 10 years since our foundation started, it has been our privilege to help the very weakest children in the Nepali society. Not only are the cp-children of Nepal physically handicapped, they also suffer from a social stigma. The Nepalese culture, with its caste system, is so different from Western culture. The major cultural difference between Nepal and the West is probably the most striking thing we have learned over the last 10 years.

Religion plays a very important role in the lives of the Nepalese; and it is believed that having a disabled child is a punishment of the gods. The SGCP is working to fundamentally shift the parents' thinking: we tell the parents the gods have in fact chosen them to love these children, and to take care of them.

When we began our work for the SGCP, we looked for experts and were fortunate to find the ICPS in London. One of the team members who visited the project in Nepal, is Anita Loring, and it is a pleasure for us to have her in our midst here today. The ICPS report made for us gave us an idea of where the SGCP was at that time and made us realize there was still much to be done. What we missed in the report was the fact that this is a development project in a developing country, but nevertheless we were happy with this report.

One of the main recommendations in the report was that we should search for a capable successor for professor Raj bhandari, the founder of the SGCP and now an elderly man. With the help of a number of committed volunteers, professor Raj bhandari started SGCP in 1987. Under his inspiring leadership, SGCP has helped CP families (both children and parents) to lead a better life.

CP families in Nepal learned to handle and cope with their disability. Simply acknowledging the disability to the outside world was an important first step. Parents were given the attention and support they needed. The children learned they were not alone, but had fellow sufferers; simply sharing sorrow in this regard is therapeutic.

The scope of the problem is not small. It is estimated that approximately 70.000 children in Nepal suffer from CP and many are hidden in the numerous and often poorly accessible districts of Nepal. Consequently there is much hidden suffering.

About two years ago, a new CEO was found, Mr. Bimal Shresta. We are extremely happy with him. Like professor Raj bhandari, Mr. Shresta is an inspirational person. Moreover, he is a gifted manager who quickly puts his gifts to work.

Nepal has much to be proud of. The landscape, especially the Himalayas, is spectacular, and the people are wonderful. Yet there is still so much that needs to be done. Water is scarce. electricity is not available for 8 to 16 hours a day, the political situation is unstable, there are

many strikes and road blockades: because of this, often the children and staff are not able to reach the project. Physical assistance, psychological support service and basic social welfare support systems are all lacking.

When we started 10 years ago, there were practically no training or support facilities in Nepal to help CP children and families.

Much knowledge had to come from outside of the country and much of this came from the West. Books and literature were translated and converted into useful and appropriate training and support materials. For the past few years we have been helped by Professor Günther, a child neurologist, and his wife Claudia from Dusseldorf, Germany. Twice a year they visit Nepal for a few months to make treatment plans for children and workshops. Their work is very inspiring for the staff.

The Nepalese government does not contribute to the cost of the project. All the support must come from outside and especially from private initiatives from the Netherlands, Ireland and Switzerland. The government of Nepal says this project is too small, but there are approximately 70,000 children who need to be taken care of; this underprivileged group remains largely anonymous.

The organization has been streamlined, there is good management, a motivated staff and helpers and drivers. There is professional support from the West. Land has been purchased. There is a beautifully adapted therapy building, and no rent needs to be paid anymore. There is a school for special education for approximately 40 children and the vocational training is almost in its final stages.

There is still a lot of work to be done and we hope that the ICPS will accept and appreciate this group, as well as give it advice, assistance and support.

A fulltime pediatrician is urgently needed. Perhaps you know someone who would like to contribute some of his or her time and talent.

Finally, please realize this is a cry for attention on behalf of the CP children in Nepal and of their parents.

What we are asking for is knowledge transfer and assistance. We do not view the people we want to help as a “Development Project” only.

Rather, these are people, suffering physical and psychological pain. They are part of our world, our fellow men, some of the most underprivileged people in the world. They desperately need our (and your) help and support!

Thank you very much, Namasté!

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