

## President's Newsletter

May 20, 2005

Dear Members and Friends of GHI,

Your support continues to help us work toward a world in which people are safer because they act in advance to reduce the potential of natural disasters. Over these first 14 years in the life of GHI, we've often summarized GHI's philosophy with the proverb: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Since GHI is now a budding teenager, I'd like to share with you a trendy expression of this same wisdom that I heard just a few weeks ago: "Stop mopping and turn off the faucet!"

The ongoing work of GHI and its associates to "turn off the faucet" by addressing the threat of natural hazards through advocacy, preparedness, prevention and mitigation greatly inspires me. The following paragraph tells you about one such example.

### **School Seismic Safety in British Columbia**

Perhaps you've already read our website story about GHI member Dr. Tracy Monk, a parent and family physician, who was recognized by the Canadian magazine *Today's Parent* in September for outstanding efforts on behalf of school seismic safety in British Columbia. Since she founded *Families for School Seismic Safety* ([www.fsssbc.org](http://www.fsssbc.org)) in June 2003, her efforts convinced the provincial government to undertake an assessment of the 864 school buildings within the zone of risk there. Of these schools, 311 were considered to be at high risk of sustaining severe damage to structural elements in the event of a moderate to strong earthquake. On November 6, 2004, the Premier of British Columbia made a 1.5 billion dollar commitment to seismically upgrade more than 700 schools over the next 15 years. We have supported Tracy's work and commend her successful efforts to rally community involvement. She is now participating in some GHI activities so that her exemplary leadership to make schools safer in British Columbia can be applied in earthquake-threatened developing countries.

### **Earthquake Mini-Summit**

GHI and the Seismological Society of America initiated a meeting of representatives from fourteen earthquake engineering and seismology professional societies at Lake Tahoe on April 24-25. The meeting was officially sponsored by the International Association for Earthquake Engineering, the International Association for Seismology and Physics of the Earth's Interior, and the International Union of Geological Sciences. National and regional earthquake engineering and seismology societies that participated included those of USA, Japan, China, Mexico, South America, Europe, Uganda, India, New Zealand and Turkey. The purpose was to "determine what specific types of activities the world's earth science and earthquake engineering professional societies could *jointly* undertake to better influence public policy and advocate seismic safety, internationally, in order to reduce earthquake losses" and also "to determine what concrete steps must now be taken to start these activities." Outcomes of the meeting were: (1) an action plan of our next steps, (2) a draft description of the kind of "partnership" we might form, (3) a list of 9 illustrative activities that we could do jointly, (4) an agreement that all participants will take this description and list to the Board of Directors of their societies and ask for authorization to send a representative to the next meeting to further develop this idea, and (5) an invitation by China to host the next meeting in Beijing.

## Post-tsunami Actions

During the past months we have all observed the world's outpouring of sympathy and assistance for the victims of the worst natural disaster in living memory. The December 26, 2004 South Asia tsunami and its aftermath demonstrate the fragility of vulnerable and at-risk regions in the world for which GHI envisions a stronger and safer future.

Our first response involved working with our Indian NGO partner SEEDS (Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society) to assist in both the initial and continuing relief efforts in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. More than 190 donors contributed almost \$50,000 to the GHI/SEEDS sponsored effort there. We are grateful for this expression of trust in our work, and, most important, for this opportunity to help.

Although the need for disaster *relief* in South Asia is great, it is also both humane and urgent that we take a longer, strategic view of the developing world's rapidly increasing natural disaster risk. In accordance with our mission, we now seek to broaden our current relief assistance in India and other threatened regions with substantive, post-tsunami *disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation* measures. We have developed a new GHI brochure to describe how GHI can help make tsunami warning systems effective. On behalf of GHI, Tom Tobin attended a UNESCO-organized conference in Paris (March 4-6) about responding to the recent tsunami. He learned that there is considerable effort in designing and deploying hardware to issue tsunami warnings, but there is a need for more effort in preparing communities on how to respond to warnings. This is what GHI can do. We have submitted our proposal to develop and apply tools for community-based tsunami response and mitigation planning to several major funding agencies.

## India Project (See photos)

GHI's USAID-funded *Indian Earthquake Safety Initiative* entered a new phase with a *Roll Out Workshop* held April 28-29 in New Delhi. This event launched a project that will provide earthquake engineering advice on the retrofit of five selected "lifeline" buildings in Delhi. GHI staff member Tom Tobin and GHI Board member Anselm Smolka presented at the two-day workshop, which featured the Honorable Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, who, as the Chief Guest, delivered an inaugural address. Jorge Meneses, Project Director, has worked with local Delhi officials to select the five buildings, which include a school, hospital, police headquarters, the Delhi Secretariat, and the Divisional Commissioner's Office. Marla Petal, GHI staff member, presented educational materials for stakeholders of the health and education sectors in Delhi at the project's May 2-4 *Refresher Course*. A first *Review Panel Meeting* took place May 5-7 to complete the project launch. Services that GHI will provide in this project include: 1) offering technical advice through the involvement of American and India experts, 2) the transfer and exchange of seismic safety knowledge from United States experts to selected Indian experts in Delhi, and 3) raising awareness on seismic safety of stakeholders in the health and education sectors.

Since April 1, 2005, Hari Kumar has served as the GHI Delhi representative for the project. Anna F. Lang, a graduate student in Civil Engineering at the University of California, San Diego, will serve as a part-time intern with the project. US specialists in earthquakes engaged by GHI to contribute to this project include Roger Bilham, Kip Edwards, Mel Green, Bill Holmes and Izzat (Ed) Idriss. The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs will closely observe the project with the expectation that it might serve as a pilot to be replicated nationally.

## **Central Asia Project (See photos)**

Developing a culture of community-based disaster mitigation in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan has presented us with some challenges in our OFDA-funded project. Tremendous effort was required to introduce the value of systematic information-sharing, consultation and collaboration in communities where "storing" knowledge and top-down governance are rooted in local traditions. We have worked with NGO partners in the capital cities (Almaty, Dushanbe and Tashkent) to improve disaster preparedness in schools, hospitals, and the self-built housing sector. We are also working with four universities to integrate an *Introduction to Community-Based Disaster Mitigation* course into their respective curricula.

We are grateful to Risk Management Solutions (RMS) for providing \$10,000 to underwrite a GHI project that will extend the value of our work in Central Asia. This support will enable us to produce fifteen five-minute videos for a target audience of the general public (adults and young adults in Central Asia) with the goal of increasing public awareness of disaster hazards and the capacity of the public to take mitigation actions. These videos will be popular and educational. They will be appropriate for frequent broadcast as public announcements on main television stations, as well as regional and district television. Our intent is that they will be shown during prime evening viewing hours and repeated at intervals on Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek television.

## **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and NATO Conference**

Our initiative to create a school seismic safety program for OECD countries is making steady progress, but slowly. The Council of the OECD is scheduled to vote on this matter in May. The European Investment Bank has expressed interest in funding parts of this program (in particular for Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco), if the OECD adopts it.

Over the past year I have served on the Steering Committee of a workshop organized by NATO on the subject of "Improving the Earthquake Safety of Public Buildings in the Maghreb Region." This workshop will take place in Algeria on May 22-24, the second anniversary of the Boumerdes earthquake that collapsed schools and resulted in other unanticipated damage. I am giving one of the keynote talks. Algerian government officials concerned about earthquake risk management will be present. Richard Yelland, Director of the OECD Program on Educational Buildings, has been invited to describe the GHI-OECD school seismic safety initiative. We hope that his presentation will motivate the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian government officials to join this project.

## **Death of Ray Punongbayan (GHI Advisory Board Member)**

It is with sadness that we honor the memory of Raymundo Punongbayan, 68, who served since 1995 on the GHI Board of Advisors. As director of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) from 1982 until his retirement in 2003, he was tireless in his effort to improve natural disaster management. He died in a helicopter crash on April 28, together with eight others, when returning from an aerial assessment of potential landslides in Dingalan, Aurora. According to Renato Solidum, PHIVOLCS director, Ray was trying to determine if the people of Dingalan needed to be evacuated due to the impending threat of potential landslides. Ray Punongbayan was widely recognized for his pioneer efforts to raise the awareness of Filipinos about natural hazard safety. He was loved for his humor and dedication to his profession and friends. We are grateful for his service to GHI and for his life work on behalf of reducing natural disasters.

## 2005 Support Campaign

As we approach the final lap of our 2005 Support Campaign, we have come over 75% of the way toward reaching our goal. We encourage you to help us meet our goal, which is needed for our continued work. Your membership helps GHI advocate and work for preparation, prevention and mitigation *before* natural hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis wreak havoc in the world's most vulnerable communities. Your support, when combined with the generosity and efforts of others, enables us to make a difference in the safety of millions around the world.

If you have not yet joined GHI for 2005, we hope that you will respond to this appeal. We thank those of you who have already joined during the current campaign, and we urge *all* of you to help us broaden our reach by spreading the GHI story to your colleagues and contacts. We need your commitment and support to reach our membership goal for 2005.

You can help us change the mindset in at-risk regions of the world from "mopping up" *after* natural disasters to "turning off the faucet" *before* events happen.

Thank you for your response to our appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Tucker", followed by a vertical line.

Brian Tucker,  
President

Enclosures: 2005 GHI Membership Support Card  
Photos of Current GHI Projects