

## PARTNERPLAN

# Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal October 2015

c/o United Mission to Nepal  
PO Box 126  
Kathmandu  
Nepal

Dear Friends

*Malcolm writes:* It's always difficult to strike the right balance in writing these letters. We try to share what is good and encouraging. But, as is the case in every country, there are many stories from Nepal that are very hard to hear, or to accept. One such story is in the news now.



Rato Machendranath  
towering above the  
crowds

On 25 June Nepal hosted an international conference to ask for funds for urgent earthquake relief. Foreign governments and donor agencies pledged \$4.1bn, (£2.7bn). But as we write, over five months after the first earthquake on 25 April, these funds remain unclaimed and unspent by Nepal's government. What's more, the official Nepali government body to be set up to oversee this work, the National Reconstruction Authority, has not even been formed yet, because the bill to establish it lapsed in parliament.

We find this news heart-breaking.

To avoid any misunderstanding let us stress that the organisation we serve, the United Mission for Nepal, has for some time now been extremely hard at work using the money that has been so generously donated, (including by many of you). The same is true of many other non-governmental and international organisations working here – including the UK's DfID. The sums that are reported as being unspent and unclaimed are specifically the monies pledged at the international conference on 25 June, not funds given in other ways.



Giant wooden wheels with intricately tied  
'ropes' at the base of Machendranath

The politicians say they have a reason for neglecting the work of earthquake relief. They have been busy finalising



Gradual, piecemeal demolition of  
our neighbour's house post  
earthquake

the country's new Constitution. This has been in process for the last eight years, and it was finally promulgated on 20 September. The politicians say this task needed to be finished so that the country can move ahead. But we can't help wondering what the earthquake victims would choose to get first: a new Constitution? - or new homes, new schools, new seed, new employment, and new hope?

*Malcolm continues:* The new Constitution has by no means pleased everyone in Nepal. The Constitution divides Nepal into seven new

121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

T: +44 (0)131 225 5722

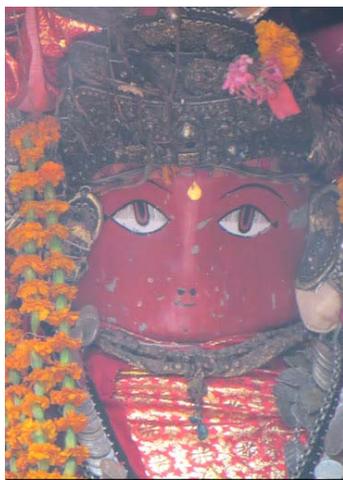
E: [world@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:world@churchofscotland.org.uk)

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provinces. But the people in the Terai (the flat strip along the southern flank of Nepal which borders on India) argue that the boundaries of these new provinces result in them being entirely excluded from proper representation. So they have been showing their anger in violent protests. These have resulted in head-on confrontations with the police. In the last six weeks or so almost 50 people – among them protesters, police, and innocent by-standers including children - have been killed.

Currently the protesters have now blocked all border crossings between India and Nepal. (Many people say that India is also enforcing the blockade to show its own annoyance at the new Constitution. But Nepali-Indian relations are of labyrinthine complexity, and way beyond our understanding). As a result Nepal is now facing extreme shortages of vital supplies, chiefly of petrol and cooking gas, all of which come by land from India. To cope with this current emergency the Nepali government here has instituted petrol rationing, and vehicles are only allowed to travel when their number plate matches the date on an odd/even basis.



Rato (red) Machendranath within his chariot

As is always the case these emergency provisions will hit the poor hardest and first. Can you imagine how being able to drive only on alternate days, (even assuming you have got some rationed petrol), will impact on those who normally survive hand-to-mouth on a day to day basis?

Please pray for the people of Nepal, at this hard and unsettling time.

(You can read a fuller account of the unclaimed and unspent earthquake funds in a Guardian report at: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/sep/24/nepal-earthquake-funds-unclaimed-unspent-national-reconstruction-authority>)

*Cati writes:* On some other fronts our work and life here continue pretty much as usual. A significant encouragement for UMN since last year has been the number of expatriates coming to join our staff. Malcolm and I have increasingly found ourselves heading to the airport in order to meet new arrivals from various parts of the world. Over the next two months for instance, we will be welcoming three separate families and helping them settle into their new homes while also adjusting to a radically different context for their lives. A new language; a new culture; a new school; a new church; and a new role on various levels.



The ubiquitous bell to wake the gods before puja (Hindu worship)



Deep in thought

Sadly the damage caused to so many houses by the two earthquakes has had the effect of landlords raising the rent on their properties by a startling percentage. It has been a real challenge recently trying to find accommodation within the budget of new volunteers coming to work with UMN. In case of unexpected crises, such as the recent earthquakes, we try to ensure that all staff live

within walking distance of one another so that we can help each other if needed. When this proximity has proved to be impossible because of properties no longer easily available, newly arrived staff members have to live in

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temporary housing while the search continues until something in the right part of the city can be found. Given that none of us own a car, our homes ideally need to be within walking or cycling distance from schools and UMN headquarters.



The essentials on the margins-living conditions for many in Nepal

We make this aspect of our role a high priority within UMN. People can often feel quite vulnerable and bewildered when they first emerge into the chaos of Kathmandu airport and the unknown future awaiting them. By meeting them off their flight and settling them into their initial accommodation, we enjoy the privileged position of introducing them to their neighbourhood, the UMN offices, their Nepali language teachers and also giving them hospitality in our own home. Thereafter we're able to maintain regular contact with them to give them whatever support and practical help they may need as the weeks and months go by.

*Cati continues:* Last week after collecting a couple from the airport and delivering them to their initial accommodation, Malcolm and I set off for home again on foot. However we found ourselves caught up in a vast crowd of people following a Hindu procession known as the Rato Machendranath. A giant wooden chariot had been built to hold a towering 18 metre construction of poles and painstakingly woven ropes. Within this mobile temple is housed the painted wooden Machendranath idol, the rainmaker god, and for several weeks this



Living conditions for many since the earthquakes



Temporary shelter on a hillside at dawn

processes through the local streets of Patan where we live, dragged at snail pace by scores of enthusiastic young men. Crowds follow behind cheering and urging on those dragging on the ropes, while the structure teeters and sways as the giant wooden wheels move it along.

Once caught within this suffocating crowd, there was little we could do beyond watching the people for whom this marks a significant event in their religious calendar. What astonished us was the sight of individuals climbing telegraph poles and without hesitation cutting down all electricity and phone cables that happened to criss-cross

the road along which this tower was supposed to be moving!

For the next two days we were once again without electricity, and the inevitable frustrations of relying on candles or torches felt reminiscent of the weeks post-earthquake when electricity was non-existent. For us of course this was an inconvenience, but for many small businesses and shops around the area, this would certainly have had serious implications. Late on Friday night while reading by torchlight, the power was suddenly restored and it felt positively LUXURIOUS being able to get out of bed and put on the light! In fact we celebrated by switching on the kettle and making a pot of tea instead of going to sleep, our energy and spirits restored and ready for whatever surprises might be in store next!



Applying the tika: a symbol of blessing from the gods

With love and prayers,

121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN  
T: +44 (0)131 225 5722 E: [world@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:world@churchofscotland.org.uk)  
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