

WAND - St Barb's - May 2nd 2015

Recent Earthquake

The time is 11:56 Nepal Standard Time on 25 April

The earth shakes - Magnitude 7.8 - Depth 15km / 9.3 miles

Centuries-old buildings were destroyed at UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Kathmandu Valley

The Dharahara tower, built in 1832 collapses and kills at least 180 people

The fortunate side-step or scamper from a date with death

As of May 1st - 6,700 dead

Injured - more than twice as many (13,932) ... were injured.

Glaciers of Mt Everest glisten in the morning sun

Pristine snow / packed ice get the attention of numerous camera lenses

Suddenly, beauty becomes the beast

The earthquake triggers an avalanche, killing at least 19, making it the deadliest day on the mountain in history.

It triggered another huge avalanche in Langtang valley, where 250 are now missing.

Towns and villages near the epicentre of Saturday's earthquake in central Nepal have suffered "almost total devastation", the Red Cross says.

Assessment teams say they have found survivors in a "desperate situation".

But the fate of thousands more in many remote areas remains unknown and the government has warned that the death toll could rise to more than 10,000.

Continued aftershocks occurred throughout Nepal, with one shock reaching a magnitude of 6.7 on 26 April at 12:54:08 NST.

The country is at continued risk of landslides as well.

Geophysicists and other experts had warned for decades that Nepal was vulnerable to a deadly earthquake, particularly because of its geology, urbanization, and architecture.

Institutions & Structures

What might all of this have to do with us?

Truth:- an earthquake has never killed anyone.

Collapsing structures kill and maim people.

It is when ceilings collapse and crush those who seek shelter within.

It is when walls wobble and fall on frail bodies

It is when lightpoles "lick up" onlookers

It is when mountainsides come sliding down on unsuspecting villages

Collapsing structures kill people!!

What is the condition of our structures?

Our Families

Our neighbourhoods

Our Communities

CYO / 4H Clubs / Scout Troops / Girl Guides / Red Cross Links / Cultural Groups / Women's Groups / Steelbands of East PoS

Many, if not most, have collapsed or are collapsing ... and crushing our people

And what of our Formal Structures:

Justice Structures / Education / Transportation / Security / Health ??

The Social and moral quakes / the economic and technological tremors / the spiritual aftershocks continue unabated and become more intense

As they occur, they kill and maim us and our people
... physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, sense of personhood ...

Are we ready - are we prepared?

The ODPM speaks of 60% readiness for disasters

Reprise:

In Nepal, geophysicists and other experts had warned for decades that Nepal was vulnerable to a deadly earthquake, particularly because of its geology, urbanization, and architecture.

Let's substitute some words:

In T&T experts had warned for decades that we were vulnerable to a deadly earthquake, particularly because of our history, our governance, social inequity, and our pervasive culture of disrespect

The ODPM speaks of 60% readiness for disasters

Who speaks of our readiness to meet the challenges of the other earthquakes that we will inevitably face?

The voices are many ... but who is listening? Who is attending?

Duality of Focus and Action

What does it take?

At Kathmandu's historic Durbar Square soldiers and volunteers form human chains to remove the debris, brick by brick.

The bricks come from temples and other historic buildings levelled by the earthquake. Many are very old and are being stored so that they can be used to rebuild these ancient sites.

The soldiers are joined by aid workers - but also tourists. One French visitor said she "just wanted to help". But it's an ad hoc approach which characterises the entire relief operation. I met rescue and medical teams from France and China. After wandering around they left. "We don't know what we are supposed to be doing," one French rescue worker told me. Their services are required in the remote villages where many are in urgent need of assistance - but they are stuck here in the capital because no-one is telling them what to do.

Why does this sound so much like a commentary on our current context?

We can easily be characterised as operating as follows:

- Desire without focus
- Energy without direction
- Aspiration without organisation

August 28th 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.

Martin Luther King (MLK) - "I Have A Dream"

Lofty and aspirational - speaking of a desired future

People are moved ... and that is necessary ... but it is not enough !!

As we reflect on our current circumstance, we should consider that MLK demonstrated what we might well seek to emulate ...

Because I am certain that on Monday morning he was "on the ground" ... campaigning ... demonstrating ... advocating ... influencing ...

The critical mix is to dream of and advocate for a desired future, for a promised land, even as we do what has to be done "on the ground" ... today.

That "mix" is what is necessary in the context of earthquakes ...

We can and ought to celebrate the rescue of an infant after 22 hours in the rubble, or that of a man who spent 5 days trapped in the ruins ... we need to do that.

Yet even as we stand in triumph in the rubble from which we rescued the one or two, the stench of the hundreds of rotting bodies takes our breath away.

Certainly, we need to direct our attention and action to individuals trapped in the rubble of our social collapse ... but is that enough?

How much does it matter if we pull our individual children, our nephews, nieces and neighbours out of the rubble and ignore the continuing collapse as the rest of our society crumbles around us?

Even as we seek to save the one, we must strengthen the structures to protect the many.

Even as we focus on the now, we must keep an eye on the future.

The UN has also warned of the challenges facing Nepal's farming community, which comprises up to two-thirds of the country's 27 million people.

It says that the quake destroyed seed stocks for the mid-May rice sowing season, as well as grains kept dry in stone storage huts that have now been razed to the ground.

If farmers miss this month's planting season, they will be unable to harvest rice - Nepal's staple food - until late 2016.

It cannot be just about getting food to the survivors, today.

It must be about anticipating and putting things in place for the future.

And it is in this context that we locate the work of WAND - Women In Action For The Needy And Destitute (WAND)

WAND has taken on the challenge to strengthen an institutional structure here at the Morris Marshall Development Foundation.

This WAND Initiative is about taking care of the now ... taking action to rescue those in danger today ...

But this WAND Initiative is also about tomorrow ... the strengthening of an institutional structure that will continue to protect, serve and save others into the future.

They have mobilised and been supported by others in the business of strengthening structures, and all contributors have to be congratulated.

Congratulations and sincere thanks for helping to make us ready for the earthquakes that lie ahead.

*This feature address was presented by **L. Anthony Watkins** at:*

WOMEN IN ACTION FOR THE NEEDY AND DESTITUTE (WAND)

In conjunction with the

MORRIS MARSHALL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Opening Ceremony of the Refurbished Morris Marshall Development Centre,

St. Barbs, Laventille,

Saturday, May 2, 2015