

Kankhal on 04/28/2015

Dear friends,

As the founder of the association Humanitarian Himalayas four years ago, I'm feeling particularly moved by the news of the earthquake that struck the region in Kathmandu on Saturday, April 25th. I've finished to accompany a group from Tenzin Palmo, the English who lived as a Tibetan nun eleven and a half years in a cave in the Himalayas. We had two wonderful encounters with her. I returned yesterday to my base in India, Kankhal near Hardwar at the foot of the Himalayas, on the banks of the Ganges. There is barely an hour, I was able to talk with Pushpraj Pandey. A native of Nepal, he was educated from the age of five in the ashrams of Ma Anandamayi. I've known him for 25 years. He returned with difficulty yesterday to Kankhal where he has his home, with his son who is studying medicine in Kathmandu and who he was visiting. He was still in shock. He was walking, ten meters from Dhrara Tower, in Sudara, the great tower of Kathmandu, at 11:55 am on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>, when the earthquake occurred. The destiny wanted it to fall on the other side, on the side of street vendors and nearby houses. He received splinters of stone and was slightly injured by falling, but survived with the people around him. They were wrapped in a thick fog of dust for at least one minute. The tremors were so violent that they "bounced on the ground like footballs" in his words. He tried to help an old lady but was again found thrown to the ground. He was about 20 minutes before in Hanuman Dhoka, Durbar Square, the historic gem of the capital, which has been reduced to rubble status in a few tens of seconds. They then went to Tudikhel, the park in central Kathmandu, to take refuge away from buildings that could collapse with a new shock. The University's building of the medical department where his son was taking an exam was cracked by the first shock, but the students were able to flee. A day later, the second shock laid down the building. President of Nepal himself is living in a tent. Western tourists have shown, according to the testimony of Pushparaj, pragmatism and efficiency in helping to evacuate people in areas away from the buildings. They soon realized the problem and what to do. Unfortunately, many must be buried in Thamel's hotels that collapsed after the first quake.

After what Pushpraj says is a mixture of sublime and sordid. Many of the hotels boys took risks coming back into buildings to provide mineral water and food, free for people sitting in public parks. The hotel where he was staying behind the Embassy of France in Lazimpat, has provided food and distributed free meals to hundreds of people. A second quake brought down their kitchen and engulfed their dishes, but they kept outdoors and obtained plates and dishes from neighboring houses. The roads were cut for India, and the airport was congested. Some companies have increased by 6 the price of tickets to Delhi, but as people could not pay, planes sometimes could flight with two third empty sits, as in the one taken by Pushpraj with his son. He had protested in vain with the skipper, they responded as is traditional with the employees, that they had orders ... That was certainly not ethical. Among the blacklisted we can count Spicejet, the private low-cost one. On the opposite, Air India helped a lot. Pushparaj speaks, with admiration, about the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, who acted quickly and only phoned the President of Nepal in his tent to announce him that he was sending the Indian Army and helicopters directly. Twenty major helicopters of the Indian Army were to rescue the isolated villages. Ishan, the student son of Pushraj admired the efficiency of the Sikhs, with their well-known turban, who organized the rescue there. He worked with them to help. One of Delhi Sikh institutions directly sent 25,000 food packets. According to UNICEF, about one million children are affected by the disaster.

The number of casualties announced by the newspapers on Tuesday morning reached about 5,500 people, but is very likely to increase in the coming days, when communication with the central districts of Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk will be restored.

### **What to do?**

Last night, I met Lakhpat Singh Rana, in Kankhal. We are supporting his great school of 450 students in the Himalayas, since its foundation, about eight years ago. He has direct experience in the management of natural disasters since he hosted for a few days about a thousand pilgrims from Kedarnath, after the floods of June 16, 2013 that left more than 5,000 dead. He then hosted a few hundred paramilitaries who worked for relief.

He advises us to do now fundraising for relief, but to send a team later on site, probably not before a month because of the risk of new shockwaves. In addition, the team will conduct a field study to determine the real needs and thus be able to better target the distribution of money to help victims regain a normal life. One option would be to focus the help on the rehabilitation of a village in the district the most affected by funding the construction of houses of corrugated iron.

Currently, we must leave for the army and major international organizations, earthquakes management specialists to deal with the emergency. We're building a team with people we know well: two Nepalese who have proven themselves in selfless social work, Chandra Bahadur that those who came to spend a night in the village of Thakunchor near Pokhara with our groups, will remember and Ganesh Rawat Surkhet in western Nepal, hiking guide I have known for over twenty years and who founded the ADC, Aid to Disabled Children, an organization that we support almost from its beginnings four years ago with our association Humanitarian Himalayas. And we think also about two Indians: Lakhpat Singh Rana, we talked about earlier. He has direct experience in the management of natural disasters in the Himalaya. And finally, my partner for travel, Dinesh Sharma. Those who came with my groups in India know him. He founded *Teerth Travels*. He has no groups in the coming months and therefore proposes to join the team. He is even building up an NGO which probably will be called *Save Himalaya*. He knows in Uttarakhand a network of wealthy people who would be willing to help. He could have perished in the earthquake, as he had only five days between two groups in Nepal, the first of 37 people had left four days before, and the second was to come in early May. So he had seriously thought about staying there, but eventually decided to return to Kankhal. The Park Village hotel where we usually reside is destroyed at 80% and its owner also lost his own house. With Dinesh we also have a direct contact with Kathmandu where he has many relations. He was able to reach some of them so we have direct real-time news. You can contact him directly, he speaks fluent French:

[dinesh@teerth.org](mailto:dinesh@teerth.org) - 00 91 98 97 28 39 82

Furthermore, Pushpraj knows personally Mr. Bhattarai, an adviser to the Prime Minister of Nepal and some other persons of high administration, and in this sense may facilitate removal of administrative obstacles.

If you want to practice compassion in action helping to support the victims of this natural disaster, you can contact and send your checks to:

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**Or make a direct transfer (specify your purpose and inform Adriana), to:**

Bank: BNPPARIBAS, 31 rue Jussieu - 75005 Paris

RIB: Bank code 30004

Agency code 00042

Account number 00010049969

Key RIB 27

IBAN: FR76 3000 4000 4200 0100 4996 927

BIC : BNPAFRPPXXX

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*A receipt can be delivered by Adriana ARDELEAN, President of the Association (Law 1901)*

With all my friendship

Jacques Vigne