

9 July 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Cultural Impacts of Earthquake Damage in Nepal

Dear Secretary Kerry,

I am writing on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) in support of any and all efforts to extend humanitarian aid to the areas in Nepal impacted by widespread destruction associated with the 25 April 2015 earthquake and its continuing series of aftershocks, as well as an effort to address the enormous cultural losses. The loss of these sites, many of which are numbered among the most significant in the world, will forever separate us from the priceless information that they contain and, by extension, from our collective past. While the humanitarian crisis, the need to care for the injured, and the demand for food, shelter, and medicine in one of the world's poorest areas must take precedence, in the wake of these immediate losses great cultural damage has taken place, and continues to take place.

The Katmandu valley lies at a historic crossroads of Asian trade routes, religion, and cultures, and represents a rich tradition of art and architecture dating back centuries. Its internationally treasured monuments and cultural sites are of extraordinary quality and importance, mixing Indian and Tibetan styles as well as Hindu and Buddhist iconography. The Katmandu Valley was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979.

The destruction of cultural and historic icons from the recent earthquake is staggering. In Katmandu's Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site, the 1690 Maju Deval temple was destroyed; the seventeenth-century King Pratap Malla Statue fell from its column and was smashed; and many historic buildings in and around the square were leveled. A portion of the Taleju Temple complex, one of Katmandu's most important Hindu sites, also collapsed. Elsewhere in Katmandu, the Trailokya Mohan Narayan Temple was destroyed. The Dharahara Tower, a nine-story brick structure constructed in 1832 which was recently restored and reopened to the public, was also destroyed. The losses were by no means confined to Katmandu. Much of Patan's Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site south of Katmandu, was reduced to rubble. In Bhaktapur, east of Katmandu, the Vatsala Shikhara Temple was devastated.

The preservation of these sites is essential not just from a cultural perspective, but from an economic one as well. It is estimated that some 10 percent of Nepal's economy is based on tourism, and these cultural sites anchor the cultural tourism of the region. While there have been reports of looting and black-market sale of art and architectural fragments, there also reports of locals (including both police and private citizens) banding together to protect these important sites from looting and vandalism.

SAH strongly endorses and supports all efforts to document, salvage, and restore the cultural heritage of the parts of Nepal damaged by the earthquake and its aftershocks. Several members of SAH are experts in the historic architecture characteristic of the areas currently under threat. If we may be of assistance in any way, either as an organization or by facilitating communication

between your staff and individual SAH members with particular expertise, it will be our privilege so to do.

We are grateful for your efforts in this regard, and we strongly support any endeavor by the State Department to protect and restore the irreplaceable cultural heritage of Nepal affected by the earthquake and its aftermath.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'B', 'C', and 'G' in a stylized, cursive font, followed by a horizontal line.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C  
Chair, Heritage Conservation Committee  
Society of Architectural Historians