

Randolph Langenbach
6446 Harwood Avenue
Oakland, California 94618

RL@conservationtech.com

www.conservationtech.com
www.traditional-is-modern.net

510-428-2252

Mobile: 510-551-8926

February 27, 2011

To whom it may concern,

RE: Nomination of the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), Government of Pakistan and UN-HABITAT, for the 2011 Sasakawa Award.

I am writing this letter to convey my support for the nomination of ERRA and UN-HABITAT for the 2011 Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction.

These two agencies – one representing the Government of Pakistan, and the other an international agency of the United Nations, have in close cooperation together successfully undertaken a post-disaster reconstruction and recovery program of enormous scale covering a mountainous area of almost unprecedented size and difficulty of access. Over the course of four years since the earthquake that claimed over 80,000 lives, they have been instrumental in the reconstruction of a total of 418,000 houses, and the rehabilitation and strengthening of an additional 148,000.

What is more important than the numbers, is the fact that this program has been undertaken with great sensitivity to the needs and wishes of the affected population. Instead of the more usual pattern of sending in international teams of contractors and NGOs to build what are often military rows of houses that are unresponsive to local needs and aspirations, ERRA and UN-HABITAT, working closely with creative individuals within their own organizations and other NGOs, undertook a program that enabled the affected families to “build back better” by being able to construct their own houses and thus take control of their own recovery process on their own land. The training programs which were set up after the disaster succeeded in training thousands of carpenters and other community members in improved construction methods.

One of the most important achievements was that ERRA broadened the definitions of “compliant” Government approved house types eligible for funding to include indigenous vernacular architecture and construction systems that were more suitable for local builders to be able to safely undertake, while still achieving the same or higher standards earthquake resistance as intended from the beginning. This allowed the use of local materials, and has help to support and augment local skills that would not have been possible had the only compliant systems been of reinforced concrete.

In the book that I wrote, *Don't Tear It Down, Preserving the Earthquake Resistant Vernacular Architecture of Kashmir*, published in 2009 by UNESCO's New Delhi office, I reported on page 49:

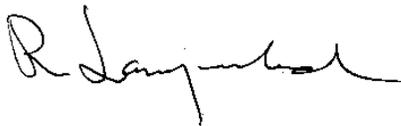
“While overseeing a programme covering the construction of 630,000 new and repaired houses, Waqas Hanif, the ERRA Programme Manager for Rural Housing, came to embrace both dhajji and bhatar [traditional timber and masonry construction types] and thus was key in ensuring both were approved as compliant. ... The earthquake...served to bring urbanized and university-educated architects and engineers into contact with the culture and indigenous building crafts characteristic of the rural regions...After such a devastating earthquake, they could witness for themselves what survived and what failed...Before either dhajji or bhatar could be adopted, both the foreign and the Pakistani professionals had to jettison their pre-existing prejudices to accept and improve upon premodern systems that were taught to them by the local people themselves. This stands as a remarkable example of openness, creativity and acceptance at all levels.”

Although I was only in Pakistan for a relatively short period one year following the earthquake, I have been in continuous touch with Senior Technical Advisor Maggie Stephenson at UN-HABITAT and Architect Tom Schacher of SDC who kept me informed of the progress of this ERRA directed reconstruction program. Both of these individuals were instrumental in the success of this reconstruction program. Tom Schacher has said in 2008, quoted in my UNESCO book, *“the readiness of the engineering consultants to the government to review their dogmas and approve construction practices hitherto unknown to them and for which they often didn't have the required scientific evidence was extraordinary.”*

It is for these and other reasons that I hope that ERRA and UN-HABITAT are both recognized for the incredible work and dedication they have shown following the Kashmir earthquake of 2005 in furthering the recovery of this large and complex rural and urban damage district. It is also important to recognize that this program was undertaken at a time of significant domestic and international stress in Pakistan and between Pakistan and India centered over the future of the parts of Kashmir in each country. The ERRA / UN-HABITAT program has already become a model for some of the reconstruction work currently being carried out after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Thank you for considering my support for this recognition.

Sincerely yours,



Randolph Langenbach, FAAR
UNESCO consultant
FEMA Senior Analyst (Retired)