

THE OMPRAKASH FOUNDATION



AN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

January 6, 2009

Dear friends,

Four years after we created the Omprakash Foundation, my five partners and I find ourselves, our country, and our planet at a moment of great difficulty and great possibility. More than ever before, we know that our lives are interconnected with the lives of others, and that our everyday decisions affect the entire global community. This fundamental interdependence demands that we work to know our world and our place within it, for only such knowledge will enable our generation to responsibly shape the future we inherit. The Omprakash Foundation has emerged in response to this demand, and it is with gratitude and humility that I write to inform you of its growth.

We are pleased to report that in 2008 we raised over seventy-five thousand dollars and reallocated most of these funds towards projects as diverse as an after-school center in South Africa, a school for girls in Tibet, and a massive book distribution effort that offered nearly a quarter-million recycled books to schools and libraries throughout India. We also launched our new Volunteer Grant program, enabling five Americans to serve our foreign partners while expanding our network at home and abroad. A full description of our achievements during 2008 can be found on our website, www.omprakash.org. We are proud of these accomplishments, and offer our deep gratitude to the donors whose generosity has made them possible.

It is worth noting from the outset, however, that such facts carry the risk of obscuring our basic purpose and also, therefore, the purpose of this letter. In today's world of philanthropy, the term 'Foundation' suggests an administrative entity that works primarily to collect funds and redirect them towards a given cause or set of causes. However, raising and redistributing money is not our core goal, nor even an essential step towards the achievement of this goal. As we enter our fifth year, we hope to continue providing strategic funding to sustainable grassroots health and education projects around the world, but our fundamental mission is at once more simple and more ambitious: we aim to use the connective force of the Internet to build relationships between our foreign partners and a global network of social actors that can learn from and support their work.

The democratizing and equalizing power of the Internet enables individuals to share and access information on an unprecedented scale, and our work revolves around promoting this sort of collaborative exchange. By helping innovative health and education projects represent themselves and their needs on our website, we create a platform from which voices addressing local issues can be heard and understood by a global audience.

The end product of this networking is not a unidirectional model of 'charity' in which one group of people is moved by pity or compassion to help another. We offer a new model of social transformation, one that begins with communication, collaboration, and human-to-human relationships, and proceeds as a mutual learning process in which everyone has something to give. It is in this sense that we are working to foster a global educational community, and we believe that such a community must be the bedrock of social change in the twenty-first century.

By introducing our website to high-school and college communities across America, we strive to ensure that our nation's next generation of leaders can access the information that will link them to meaningful volunteer opportunities around the world. Moreover, our Volunteer Grant program provides financial

support to qualified individuals who have demonstrated that they will help further our mission at home and abroad. The grants we awarded in 2008 have helped connect communities in California, Indiana, Oregon, Maine, and New Hampshire with educational projects in Nepal, Thailand, Peru, Tibet, and Afghanistan. The recipients of these grants will be ambassadors of our network for years to come, and we consider their efforts and the future of our Volunteer Grant program to be fundamental to our broader goal of encouraging the world's citizens to share the responsibility of learning from each other.

Four years ago, we began by trying to connect more volunteers, donors, and fundraisers with one worthy organization in northern India. Today, our constantly expanding network includes forty-six partners in eighteen countries. In 2008, over three thousand people used our website's free database of volunteer and fundraising opportunities, and we helped link our diverse partners with supporters not just from the United States, but also from Canada, Sweden, England, and India. We strongly believe that our world's most precious resource is neither money nor oil nor water, but *information*, and for this reason our proudest accomplishment—and greatest challenge—lies in the capacity of our website to provide people with the information that will empower them to understand and contribute to the human community from which they are indivisible.

In these challenging economic times, it brings us great comfort to emphasize that this fundamental goal—helping people share information and build cross-cultural relationships—costs us very little money to achieve. Neither I nor any of my five co-directors receive any compensation for our work, and thus our annual administrative expenses amount to just a few hundred dollars—the cost of running our website and conducting basic marketing campaigns.

Thus, as this new year unfolds, our supporters should know that we will remain viable and that we will continue to provide an important service to the world by maintaining our website and the network that grows from it. I stress now more than ever that this is a newsletter, not a fundraising letter. We welcome all donations, but more than anything else we invite you to visit our website, learn more about our efforts, and join us in working to continue expanding our network to those who might benefit from it, both at home and abroad. This task demands that we open not our bank accounts, but our hearts, and that we look not towards the bottom line, but towards a future unknown and a world yet unborn.

We offer our profound gratitude for your interest and support, and wish you a new year full of peace and happiness.

Sincerely,

Willy Oppenheim

Omprakash Foundation Co-Directors:
Ashley Moore, Elliott Wright, Gordon Guthrie, Nick Smith, and Steve Le

Please don't hesitate to contact me with your questions, comments, and suggestions: willy@omprakash.org; 203-554-0350. If you would like to donate, checks made out to "Omprakash Foundation" may be sent to Willy Oppenheim, 112 Rosebrook Rd., New Canaan, CT, 06840. You can also donate online by visiting www.omprakash.org/donate. We encourage all donors to earmark checks for causes of their choice.