

Press release
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The Prince Claus Fund provides relief for Chinese library destroyed by earthquake

Support of 120.000 Euro to build storage room for important collection Beichuan library

Since 2003 the CER programme of the Prince Claus Fund is providing “first aid” for cultural heritage that has been damaged or destroyed by man-made or natural disasters. CER has pledged 120.000 Euro in support to build a secure storage space for the homeless collections of the Beichuan library. The collection of the Beichuan Library is of great importance to the Qiang minority in China - one of the 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by the Chinese government. The support of the Beichuan library is the first CER project in China.

The county of Beichuan was devastated by an earthquake on 12 May 2008 that struck the province of Sichuan in central western China. Nearly 20,000 people were killed and 14 million displaced. Most of the infrastructure was destroyed during the quake or buried under the resulting landslides. The library building collapsed entirely, which led to the death of one staff member and lay its valuable collections under more than 20 metres of debris. The Library Director, Ms Li Chun, was rescued after being buried under the rubble for 75 hours. She spent months in hospital recovering.

The Library played an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of the endangered Qiang minority in the province and had the most important collection of books by the Qiang. Despite the extreme conditions, the dedicated library staff continues to courageously serve local readers after the disaster by establishing and operating some twenty temporary library branches constructed in hardboard in villages throughout Beichuan county. They are all managed by volunteers who have committed themselves to at least six months of service to enrich the cultural lives of people affected by the quake.

With the 120.000 Euro support of CER the Beichuan Library will create storage rooms in the complex of the new library building. The construction of the library building on a new location will start in September.

Centre Céramique: Torchbearer for Beichuan Library

To identify important sites where quick action is essential in any part of the world, CER relies on the good will and prompt response of people and organisations who share the conviction that culture is a basic need and must be part of humanitarian aid. CER's mission to rescue endangered cultural heritage appeals to international citizenship. Centre Céramique, a library and cultural centre of the municipality of Maastricht, was the first organisation to pledge support as a CER Torchbearer to help financing a CER action. Centre Céramique is therefore supporting the CER project at Beichuan Library with 10.000 Euro.

Cultural Emergency Response (CER) provides “first aid” for cultural heritage that has been damaged or destroyed by man-made or natural disasters. CER is a programme of the Prince Claus Fund. CER was launched in 2003 in reaction to the looting of the National Museum of Baghdad that shocked the world. Since then it has provided aid to cultural heritage in emergency situations in over twenty countries throughout the world.

The Prince Claus Fund is a platform for intercultural exchange. It works jointly with individuals and organisations that are mainly located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean on the realisation of activities and publications that contribute to a positive exchange between culture and development. The Prince Claus Fund is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dutch Postal Code Lottery. www.princeclausfund.org

Centre Céramique is a cultural institute with a library and exhibition space and is in charge of Maastricht's cultural inheritance. Exhibitions are held in the field of art, photography, archaeology, cultural history. It also houses The Maastricht pottery collection of Sphinx and Société Céramique. Centre Céramique's goal is to inspire people by bringing them in contact with culture. www.centreceramique.nl

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