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Administrator of the Award
The Sasakawa Team
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)
9-11 Rue de Varembe
CH1202 Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Administrator of the Award,

LETTER OF NOMINATION FOR THE SASAKAWA AWARD

I respectfully refer to the above.

2. It is our great honour and pleasure to nominate SlopeWatch for the 2015 Sasakawa Award for its tireless efforts, dedication, and leadership in spearheading community involvement in landslide risk reduction.

3. In Malaysia, landslides are the third most frequent disaster owing to its tropical climate which brings about level of high rainfall. Although the trigger of most landslides in the country is prolonged or intense rainfall, there are many factors contributing to the landslide incidents—most of them man-made. Some of the most disastrous events include the 1994 Highland Towers landslide which wiped out an entire condominium block, killing 48 dwellers; the 1996 Pos Dipang event which was a natural landslide that killed 44 villagers; the 2003 Bukit Lanjan incident that cost almost USD250 million in direct and indirect costs; and the 2011 landslide in Ulu Langat that claimed the lives of 15 children when it hit an orphanage. And even as we speak, the Public Works Department and the Department of Mineral and Geosciences are investigating a landslide north of Kuala Lumpur that caused the evacuation of 2,000 residents. Such landslide events are prevalent in Malaysia, with scores of incidents that happen on a regular basis, causing unease and sense of fear among residents in their own homes.

4. But one organization is trying to change all that. SlopeWatch is a community-based organization that has elevated the experiences of a tragedy to a higher plane of disaster awareness and collective knowledge. The community residents that founded SlopeWatch were themselves victims of the 2008 landslide that wiped out 14 homes and killed six of their neighbours in Bukit Antarabangsa, a relatively peaceful suburb in the foothills of Kuala Lumpur. The shattering realization that what appeared to be 'safe' in the eyes of the residents was in reality, not was a wake-up call. After interviewing residents and victims on what they witnessed before the landslide, authorities and the residents realized that the signs of an impending landslide were present weeks, even months, before the incident, but nobody knew that these signs—such as water ponding at the foot of the slope, thatches of trees toppling down the slope—signified a disaster in the making. In the wake of this realization, a group of residents from various communities within the Bukit Antarabangsa area compiled a list of the signs, and together with the Public Works Department and the local authority, have been working tirelessly carrying out outreach programs and community talks teaching residents about the mechanisms of a landslide, what are the types of landslides, what to watch out for,

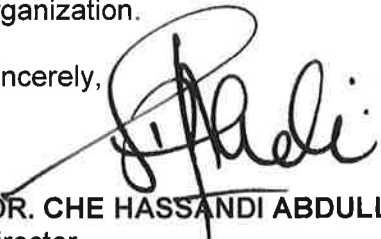
and what mitigation actions to take. Most significantly, it teaches residents how to report the signs to the local authorities for their immediate follow-up action.

5. To date, SlopeWatch has handled 125 cases that have been reported by the residents, all on volunteer basis. Local authorities say that the value of SlopeWatch-generated reports is that the reports are vetted and filtered to weed out frivolous or unrelated reports and allows the authorities to deploy their staff and resources more efficiently. SlopeWatch has given numerous talks at Agenda 21 seminars to encourage local councillors to act as focal points for resident reports; given outreach community talks in at-risk areas as well as schools; made appearances on broadcast media to raise awareness as well as to educate the public-at-large; and ran advertorials in print media to raise awareness during the monsoon season. SlopeWatch's presentation revolve around the concepts of "Learn, Monitor, Maintain, and Report", which are the desired behaviour or actions to be elicited from the general public.

5. In addition to working on the ground work by teaching residents how to monitor and maintain, SlopeWatch is also an advocate for making institutional and policy changes in the guidelines, policies and laws that govern urban planning and development order approval in hillside areas. Earlier this year, it initiated an issues-driven seminar that called in speakers from various sectors of society covering legal, technical, planning, societal, institutional, and enforcement to highlight existing problems and suggest measures needed to address them. SlopeWatch was able to do this under the auspices of the Expert Committee on Slope Safety under the Malaysian Construction Industry Development Board, of which it is a member. It is also a grantee under the Small Grants Programme overseen by the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Program. And finally in 2012, SlopeWatch was awarded a medal for community service (*Pingat Jasa Kebaktian*) by the Sultan of Selangor.

6. SlopeWatch's unflinching commitment to teach residents to become the "eyes and ears" of the local authorities, who cannot be everywhere all the time to catch the signs of landslides, has made it a model for communities in other hillside areas throughout the country. By upholding the values of community service and concern for public safety, SlopeWatch has made contributions to society worthy of recognition and distinction. As a working partner of SlopeWatch through whom the Slope Engineering Branch is able to better serve the needs of the public, I strongly urge you to bestow the Sasakawa Award to this most notable cause and organization.

Sincerely,



(DR. CHE HASSANDI ABDULLAH)

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