



Tuesday 1st December 2008

Dear Assembly Participant:

It is an honour to welcome you to GuideStar International's (GSI) third assembly. Given the global economic environment, we are indeed fortunate that you were willing to journey to join these deliberations. I speak for GSI's board and staff in expressing our appreciation and in promising to do everything we can to validate your decision to come to London. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Bulldog Trust whose generosity has enabled us to host our assembly once again in this wonderful building.

As a global society, we are in quite a pickle. *The Financial Times* reported last week that the Dow Jones Industrial Average had lost ½ of its value in the past 12 months. All of the sudden the opportunity to address long-term problems must take a back seat to the more immediate need to preserve some semblance of a global financial system and preserve some of the gains we've made in the past 15 years to raise living standards and keep a suddenly, dangerously high marginal population from facing another triple threat – hunger, disease and hopelessness. It is in these trying circumstances that I welcome you to London. I really do mean welcome. I think it is important that you are here. It is important that we talk about how our respective work can support a better, more stable, more empowered citizen-driven future.

As you walk around central London today you will see few outward manifestations of the problems to come that we all read about. GSI staff is committed to help make your stay here comfortable and to help solve any accommodations or other problems that might emerge. If you have any questions in that respect, please ask any member of GSI staff. We will each be happy to assist you or find someone else who can answer your questions.

The GSI team is also committed to do whatever it can to ensure that your time at the assembly itself is informative, productive and energizing. Alas, GSI alone cannot guarantee that result. It will depend far more on the contributions made by you, the remarkable group of leaders in attendance. If past experience and the quality and diversity of this delegate body are indicative, we can expect a highly stimulating two days. Though we did receive a few last minute regrets, due to diminishing cash positions or immediate crisis management, we are joined by fully ninety delegates, representing more than 20 countries from throughout the world.

We welcome to London several of the world's leading statisticians, data depiction experts, civil society organisation analysts and web-oriented social entrepreneurs. We welcome representatives of leading bi- and multi-lateral development agencies, national voluntary sector policy-makers and representatives of American and European foundations that are known for their recognition of the simultaneous importance of vibrant national civil societies and information. As for our current and prospective national partners, we count 49 delegates from 16 countries. Our partners bring tremendous entrepreneurial energy and commitment to develop this fundamental information component of an effective civil society.

With a room full of experts, entrepreneurs and extroverts, we cannot be certain what direction the ultimate discussion will take. We hope the agenda and speakers will stimulate thinking and discussion about how to generate and deploy information effectively to enable full citizen engagement – local, national, regional and across borders. I think we all start with a common understanding of the challenge and general opportunity. We all start with the proposition that a fully engaged citizenry is requisite for a successful society over time. And we all observe that citizen engagement, per se, finds expression in a wide range of activities – from voting to public policy advocacy to supporting, operating and governing millions of disparate civil society organizations. Finally, we all believe that good

information about evolving conditions, problems and opportunities is essential if citizens are to engage any activity on this continuum successfully.

Jetting to London for a two day conference might seem extravagant at this difficult moment. But if we can all take away something concrete, collaborative or inspiring from this amazing collection of independent-thinking but kindred spirits, then the expense and inconvenience will be worth it. After all if a meeting like this can help us unleash and sustain well-informed and empowered citizens and CSOs, we will emerge from our current global travails more quickly, less damaged and better able to pre-empt devastations like these in the future.

With some optimism and expectation therefore, I look forward to these two days and to interacting with each of you personally. I trust you will enjoy yourselves and make many new friends. I plan to.

Best wishes,

Buzz Schmidt