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URGENT MESSAGE FROM THE CHRISTCHURCH VEGETARIAN SOCIETY

On the 22nd of February at 12.51pm, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake hit the New Zealand city of Christchurch causing massive damage on an unprecedented scale. This has far-reaching effects not only in our city, but for the whole of our country, mourning the loss of homes, businesses, iconic buildings, and most tragically the loss of life. Our office was severely damaged, thankfully nobody was hurt but our organisation has suffered immensely.

Despite this we immediately went in to action, and within 24 hours of the quake, the Christchurch Vegetarian Centre had mobilised and responded to meet the needs of our vegetarian and vegan community. The Centre has co-ordinated vegan food, gas stoves, drinking water and practical help such as housing checks by a vegetarian builder and emotional support. The Centre checked and confirmed the safety of every member and responded to emails from around the world as to the whereabouts of vegetarian friends in Christchurch.

In a time of crisis, having a strong community around you is immensely healing. The Christchurch Vegetarian Centre continues to provide support for its shattered and traumatised community, in a time when our futures remain so uncertain.

When the earthquake hit our Events Co-ordinator Anna van den Bosch was inside our office in the Christchurch CBD. Everything in the Centre's office fell down around her, and as she ran from the building to safety, the ceilings caved in. Thankfully, Anna managed to escape unharmed, but the future of our Centre office is not looking hopeful. We do not know if we will ever be allowed back into Christchurch Community House to retrieve the resources that were so painstakingly built up over the years. As it stands we do not even have a leaflet to our name.

The Christchurch Vegetarian Centre is housed in the very centre of the city, in Christchurch Community House. The Centre is a branch of The New Zealand Vegetarian Society and is also the official Christchurch contact for the New Zealand Vegan Society. Our attached leaflet outlines what we do. We are New Zealand's most active vegetarian/vegan community, running many groups and events to support people to go vegetarian, and to stay vegetarian.

Even if our building is deemed safe to return to after the earthquake, its location will be an issue. Traumatized by the experience of the quake many people are not willing to return to the central city. Many of the buildings deemed safe after the September 4th earthquake collapsed on February 22nd. We feel if we were to

re-open our Centre there, few people would visit it. Office space is at a premium; with 50,000 workers being displaced in Christchurch we will struggle to find a suitable and affordable location, let alone materials to replace what we have lost.

This Centre is vital to the vegetarian community of Christchurch, and many of our members and supporters live in the city. They have lost homes, businesses, and sadly some have lost their loved ones. Now is the time for us to be strong for them, provide a place for them to come and rest, share experiences and be comforted. We want to see the city we love rebuilt, and, as many people leave the city, we want to provide support to reassure people that there is a future here in Christchurch. We are asking you to help us to rebuild our organisation, to help us build a new Centre, a solid foundation to house our strong community spirit. Out of the ashes of this terrible tragedy, we have seen what an amazing community spirit Christchurch has - everyday people rise to the challenge and become heroes, providing hope for us that we can rebuild, we will recover.

We are launching an international appeal to help rebuild the Christchurch Vegetarian Centre. We have two aims:

1. To rebuild our resources (computers, filing cabinets, desks, banners, DVDs, posters, leaflets, library, shop etc)

Estimated funds needed: NZ\$20,000

2. To open a new Christchurch Vegetarian Centre – a purpose built centre with meeting rooms, office, kitchen for cooking classes, Youth Centre, etc. A real and permanent centre for our community.

Estimated funds needed: NZ\$750,000

Please support our appeal by sharing this with your supporters.

The New Zealand Vegetarian Society has opened a bank account: The '**Christchurch Vegetarian Centre Earthquake Rebuilding Fund**' to take donations. Every donation, no matter how small, will help us rebuild our Centre and our precious vegetarian/vegan community.

For New Zealand donations the account number is:

12 3045 0360126 02

(We are a charitable trust so donations are tax deductible.)

For overseas depositors the number is:

ASBBNZ2A 12 3045 0360126 02

Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information. Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Yolanda Soryl
Christchurch Vegetarian Centre Co-ordinator