

Greetings Habitat Canada;

Before I begin to promote the benefits of Habitat for Humanity Canada (Habitat Canada) becoming involved with the projects of Hábitat para la Humanidad Colombia (Hábitat Colombia), let me introduce myself. I am Andrew Johnston and I have been an avid Habitat Toronto volunteer and crew leader since 2001 and a donor to Habitat Canada. From my graduation from the University of Guelph, I have worked in various sectors of the horticulture industry and for the past several years I have operated my own landscape design and installation business. In the winters of 2006 through 2008 I volunteered with Hábitat para la Humanidad México. In November, 2007, I visited Colombia for the first time and was introduced to several projects of Hábitat Colombia. This experience exposed me not only to a well-operated and efficient organization but a incredibly beautiful country and people, but, also, a location where there is a great need for the participation of organizations like Habitat. However, unfortunately, unlike Mexico, Colombia does not receive international brigades. I decided to return this January, 2009 to participate in the sponsorship and participation of a house. I write to you to herald the experiences I had in Colombia and with Hábitat Colombia. I write to you to encourage the participation of Habitat Canada with Hábitat Colombia through the involvement of Canadian work brigades and financial donations.

During my first visit to Colombia in 2007, Hábitat Colombia offered me the opportunity to experience a variety of their projects and, in so doing, I had the opportunity to experience different parts of the country. I worked in Bogotá in the construction of a school, in La Unión, Antioquia in a project where close to a hundred houses were being constructed, and I travelled to Quimbaya, Quindio, in the heart of the coffee district, to spend a day visiting several projects completed and in the planning stages around the area. Every stop I made, the dedication and efforts of families, volunteers, workers, and Hábitat staff impressed me immensely. Along the way I saw the need for the work of Habitat for Humanity. I returned in January, 2009 to spend two months exploring a little more of the country and working close to six weeks with Hábitat. I spent two weeks in the town of Sincelejo, Sucre participating in a project that will eventually number over 100 houses for displaced families. For the remaining time I was in Montería, Cordoba where I sponsored and participated in the

construction of a house for a single working mother and her three children. Through all of these experiences I strove to involve myself as much as possible in the process and work of building a Habitat house in Colombia. I have left both times believing that Colombia is a place in which could offer tremendous opportunities and experiences for Habitat Canada volunteer brigades and is a place in which Habitat Canada could provide substantial support.

Hábitat Colombia is a very well run and responsible organization. Someone was always in contact with me throughout my journeys whether from the National office or the affiliate office. They have excellent and highly qualified staff and work with very skilled trades people. For a volunteer, there is an abundance of work always with the guidance of the Hábitat staff and the on-site crew. The country is spectacular for its diverse landscape and touristic opportunities. There is a wealth of activities and sites to experience as a volunteer. Colombia has a strong tourist network in regards to hotels, restaurants, and public transportation. Most of all, as their tourist slogan says, Colombia is passion... I have travelled many parts of Latin America and I have to say that Colombia is unique in many ways, but what continually stole my heart away was the hospitality of the people. For a volunteer to Colombia, it is the warmth and friendliness of the people that make Colombia the place to come and participate.

I urge Habitat Canada to become involved in the projects of Hábitat Colombia, whether through the Global Village programs and/or through fund designation of donations. Colombia has a great need for international participation and Hábitat Colombia is well-prepared and waiting to host international brigades. For example, in the barrio of Villa de Los Alpes in Montería, Sucre lives the Padilla Fuentes family. This family of four, mother Enilda and father Jose and their two daughters Elaines, age 3, and Maria, age 2, live in sub-standard housing, with a dirt floor, cardboard walls, no running water and a hole in the ground outback for a washroom. With very little effort, Habitat Canada could join with Hábitat Colombia to change the lives of this family and provide a safer, healthier environment for those two little girls to realize their full potential. And there are many other such families throughout the beautiful land of Colombia that with the participation of Habitat Canada could realize the dream of adequate housing.

Through this correspondence I hope to initiate the necessary dialogue to encourage Habitat Canada to form one more bond in Latin America. Already Habitat Canada participates in many countries in the region and I write to tell you that the time has come for your participation in Colombia. I encourage you to accept the invitation of Hábitat Colombia and mine to join with jus in 2010 and help provide adequate housing for the Padilla Fuentes family.

I look forward to further discussing with you my experiences in Colombia and with Hábitat Colombia and the potential for Habitat Canada in Colombia.

Sincerely,

Andrew Johnston

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