

focus

THE MAGAZINE OF AUSTRALIA'S OVERSEAS AID PROGRAM

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TSUNAMI

SPECIAL EDITION

RELIEVING SUFFERING

OUR ABILITY TO PROVIDE FOOD, WATER, MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND SHELTER QUICKLY HAS HELPED PREVENT MANY MORE DEATHS THROUGH DISEASE AND INJURIES.

FROM THE MINISTER

Like all Australians, I was horrified by the devastation caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami that struck on 26 December last year. Never in my lifetime has a single natural disaster caused so much loss of life and suffering. We all have sympathy for those in Australia and overseas who have lost loved ones, property and livelihoods.

Since that dreadful day the international community has pulled together in support of those who have lost everything. Australia was among the first of many countries to offer emergency humanitarian aid. Our longstanding ties with countries affected, and our support for aid agencies already working in the region, have made it easier for Australia to mobilise its assistance. Our ability to provide food, water, medical assistance and shelter quickly has helped prevent many more deaths through disease and injuries. I commend the professionalism of AusAID staff and other government officials who are helping to coordinate the relief effort. In the first crucial days after the tsunami, Australians worked around the clock under very difficult circumstances to help save lives and ease suffering.

The Australian public's overwhelming response to the tsunami disaster has been extraordinary. Approximately

\$260 million has been raised through donations and thousands of people have volunteered their time and skills. This is a source of pride to us all. It demonstrates, yet again, the generosity of Australians and their willingness to help in times of need.

Some offers of goods and services have been declined and I know this has caused some disappointment. However, most people understand that urgently required goods destined for disaster areas are specific and must be culturally and technologically appropriate.

The Australian Government intends to monitor carefully the use of its \$1.06 billion tsunami aid package. The delivery of aid needs to be transparent and accountable. Government must be assured money is not wasted or misused. Funds managed by AusAID are provided to accredited United Nations agencies, non-government organisations and contractors. AusAID has checks and procedures and its accreditation process is recognised as international best practice. Companies that undertake work on behalf of the Australian Government are subject to stringent audits, reviews and evaluations.

The major focus for our disaster relief and reconstruction

is in the worst hit country – which is our immediate neighbour – Indonesia. The \$1 billion Australia–Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development announced just days after the tsunami, is the single largest commitment of overseas aid in Australia's history. It will be in place for five years to help rebuild devastated infrastructure and services, particularly in Aceh. This agreement is in addition to our existing comprehensive pre-tsunami aid program. It paves the way for even stronger cooperation and friendship between our two countries.

Through our humanitarian assistance we have also supported Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Seychelles. In Thailand, our specialist police officers have led the disaster victim identification process in Phuket.

Other components of our assistance while less visible are, nonetheless, substantial. On 27 December 2004, I announced that Australia would play a leading role in international efforts to develop a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean. We must do all we can to prevent a repeat of the terrible loss of life that occurred on Boxing Day. On 12 January 2005, the Australian Government agreed with other creditor nations to postpone the

debt repayments of tsunami-affected countries. This will free up funds for recovery and reconstruction.

The power of the tsunami and the toll it has taken on families and communities has shocked us all. I will never forget the flattened buildings and chaotic jumble of houses, trees, cars and household items encased in mud that I saw on my visit to Thailand. The memory of my visit to the mortuary in Phuket will stay with me forever. But neither will my admiration ever diminish for those brave and generous Australians who already were getting on with the job of helping out in a wide variety of tasks.

Tough times lie ahead for communities through the reconstruction phase. I take some comfort knowing that our assistance will make this process a little less daunting.



Alexander Downer
Minister for Foreign Affairs

TOP: The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, in Phuket, Thailand. During his visit he spoke with many relatives of people missing. Photo: Steve Walker/AusAID



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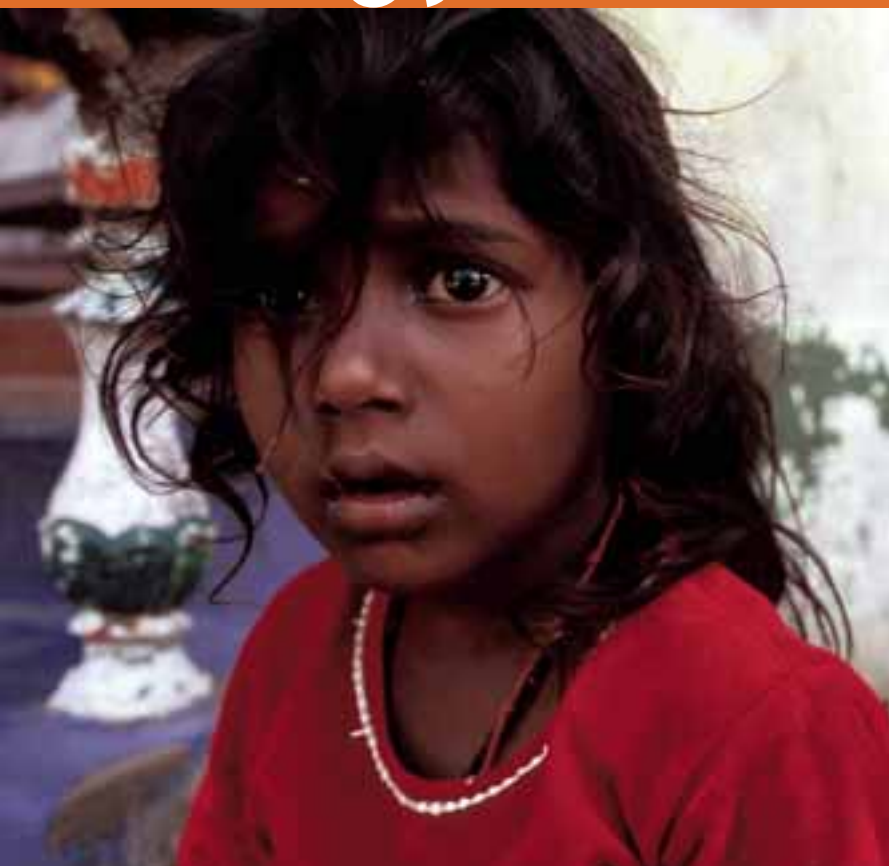
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COVER: Thousands of children died in the tsunami because they were physically less able to outrun the water or withstand its force. Many of those that survived are deeply traumatised by the ordeal.

Photo: Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures

Government aid in focus The Australian aid program is committed to reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development in the Asia Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Australian businesses and people play a major role in delivering the aid program. Australian expertise, Australian experience and Australian resources are used to tackle poverty. And by investing in development Australia is investing in its future. In 2004–05 Australia plans to spend almost \$2.133 billion on development assistance. The aid program focuses on promoting regional peace, stability and economic development through several hundred large and small-scale projects. Countries to which Australia is committed include Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu (the Pacific region); Indonesia, East Timor, Vietnam, Philippines, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Burma (East Asia); Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan (South Asia); and Africa and the Middle East.



An anguished woman asks, 'How can this be?' after losing everything.
Photo: Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures



Survivors looking for missing relatives in Ulele district come across a child's doll amid the debris, Banda Aceh, northern Sumatra. Photo: Martin Adler/Panos Pictures

THE EARTHQUAKE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN ON 26 DECEMBER 2004 CAUSED DEATH AND DESTRUCTION ON AN UNPRECEDENTED SCALE. WITHOUT WARNING AND WITH DEVASTATING FEROCITY, A TSUNAMI SMASHED COASTLINES OF 12 COUNTRIES. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE DIED, MORE THAN A MILLION ARE HOMELESS AND AN UNKNOWN NUMBER ARE MISSING. FOR SOME COMMUNITIES THERE IS NOTHING LEFT.

RELIEVING SUFFERING

RECOVERING FROM THE WRECKAGE



For those who have survived the tsunami catastrophe, an immense challenge lies ahead. Families are fractured and loved ones are missing or dead. Livelihoods have been lost and local economies are just about finished.

Infrastructure is gone. In some parts, not a house remains nor a road, bridge or water well. In the worst natural disaster in modern times the world community has rushed to help traumatised victims recover from the wreckage.



The Australian Government's response to the tsunami was immediate. AusAID officers were among the first into affected areas, gathering vital information about the impact of the disaster. 'The devastation was way beyond anything we have ever experienced. The extensive loss of life and damage to infrastructure have profound implications for communities and local economies for years to come,' says Bruce Davis, Director General of AusAID.

Just hours after the tsunami waters receded, plans to send emergency relief were underway. AusAID's Rapid Response Team, set up to manage natural disasters, swiftly mobilised. 'By the evening of 26 December, an emergency task force was formed with staff from several government departments and agencies,' says Bruce Davis. 'Over the next days the group decided on urgent assistance to the affected countries, especially Indonesia.'

LEFT: People killed in the tsunami were tagged with a number to help with identification, Thailand. Photo: Fredrik Naumann/Panos Pictures
ABOVE: Fishing boats scuttled. Many tsunami-affected communities rely on their boats to make a living. Photo: Dieter Telemans/Panos Pictures

The Australian Government immediately promised \$60 million in humanitarian aid. Shortly afterwards, the Prime Minister, John Howard, announced a separate \$1 billion assistance package for Indonesia, the country most affected by the tsunami. This is the single largest aid contribution ever made by Australia.

AusAID's Allison Sudradjat travelled to the town of Calang

on Aceh's west coast to see first hand the extent of the devastation. Ninety per cent of the people in the town had perished.

'We had been told the villages on the west coast were destroyed. They had in fact been totally erased. All that was left in village after village were the concrete pads where houses and other buildings once stood. You could see rings on the ground where the wells were

located and the odd palm tree. There was nothing else. There was no vegetation. It was like it had been wiped.

'There was a road that went down the coast. Much of it is now in the middle of the ocean. Bridges look as though a giant hand has picked them up and tossed them hundreds of metres away. You don't have to be an engineer to imagine the force involved in that.

'The devastation went for a long way inland. The west coast has a very broad flatlands area that rises quite steeply into hills. In many cases the seawater reached at least five kilometres inland. Hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of farming land has been wrecked. It will take a long time and a lot of very hard work to restore.'

In Sri Lanka, Alex Knox, an AusAID program development



Vaccination campaigns are crucial for preventing disease outbreaks.
Photo: Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures

RIGHT: Using the computers set up at City Hall, Phuket, to trace missing relatives and friends. Photo: Steve Walker/AusAID
 FAR RIGHT: Photographs of the missing line the corridors of the hospital in Phuket. Photo: Steve Walker/AusAID
 BELOW RIGHT: Australian volunteer teachers are met at the airport by Allan Davis (centre), team leader of the Australian teachers in the Maldives. Photo: Will Salter



officer, went to Unawatuna in the south. There the day after the tsunami, he saw complete disaster. 'All infrastructure had been wiped out and many people were dead. It was gruesome. We quickly started to work with local non-government agencies to help get food and water to survivors.'

One of AusAID's humanitarian specialists, Neryl Lewis, joined a five-person United Nations disaster assessment and coordination team. It arrived in Thailand three days after the tsunami. Phuket was chaos. 'There were forensic teams, search and rescue teams, embassy officials, all arriving at once. Most fishing families had lost their boats, their nets and all their equipment. In areas north of Phuket, hotels and resort areas were badly damaged or piles of rubble. There were posters of missing people all around.'

'In a village called Ban Nam Khem, just north of the Khao Lak area, I spoke to a man who had lost nine members of his family. The only reason he and one of his sons survived was because they were out of the area when the tsunami hit. You can imagine what it was like for them returning home to find the family, house and entire village washed away.'



A group of 48 Australian Federal Police officers played a major part helping Thai authorities establish a tsunami victim identification centre in Phuket.

'We were on the ground from 29 December working with forensic specialists from 30 other countries. Victim identification takes a long time and we use a system based on standards set by Interpol. To identify people, we rely on a number of personal information matches. We use medical and dental histories, DNA and other physical evidence. The process is complex but meets international standards,' says Dr James Robertson, National Manager of Forensic and Technical Services.

IN PARTNERSHIP

Through AusAID, the Australian Government is working in partnership with many non-government organisations. Many aid agencies already have an established presence in tsunami-affected countries. This has helped to maximise the speed and efficiency of the relief effort and has ensured the widest distribution of essential supplies. Clean water, food, especially fortified biscuits, medical provisions and shelter have reached thousands of people in temporary camps.

A water purification plant has been established in Banda Aceh, pumping 480,000 litres of clean water a day. 'We sent five

medical teams into Aceh with medicines, including vaccines to prevent tetanus. We also sent telecommunications technicians and equipment,' says Mark Collins, an AusAID program development officer.

'With RedR Australia, we organised for a civil engineer to work with Caritas and a water and sanitation expert to work with the Red Cross. Our aid is distributed by members of the Australian Defence Force, by small aircraft and boat charters and through organisations, such as the World Food Programme and Red Cross.'

In Sri Lanka, as well as immediate medical assistance and helping to reopen schools, Australia, through local organisations, is giving out community grants. These grants are going to the worst hit regions around Hikkaduwa, Batticaloa, Sainthamaruthu and Trincomalee. They are helping to refurbish an orphanage, replace household items and buy water purification tablets.

The coral reefs around the Maldives, vital to that country's economy, are being assessed by a team of marine scientists sent by AusAID. AusAID is also funding 15 Australian volunteer teachers



to work for several months in the country's outer islands. They'll be giving regular lessons but also helping local teachers with trauma counselling. Almost half the country's schools are damaged or destroyed. AusAID is also contributing \$500,000 to Seychelles for new shelters, to rebuild infrastructure and help with general economic recovery.

RECOVERY

The clock can't be turned back. Things will never be the same for those who bore the brunt of the tsunami. But such is the indomitable human spirit that many are beginning to reclaim their lives. The resilience and fortitude shown by many local people are inspiring. Children are returning to school, albeit in makeshift accommodation, and houses are starting to be rebuilt. The Australian Government, through AusAID, will continue to work hard to help affected communities recover as best they can. EJ



MEETING NEEDS

When Australia responds to an emergency, the most important tasks are to ensure that the relief aid gets to those who need it and as quickly as possible.

AusAID staff have experience in helping communities survive and recover from disasters, such as cyclones, floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.

Within 24 hours of the tsunami hitting, staff were mobilised under AusAID's emergency plan. Their early assessment work ensured Australia was among the first into disaster zones, shaping Australia's emergency action.

Dozens of AusAID staff remain in the field, working with governments of affected countries, the United Nations and non-government organisations, to ensure aid so desperately needed is obtained and distributed. Coordinating Australia's aid contribution is part of a massive international effort.

In Indonesia – where

Australia's aid efforts are concentrated – AusAID officers have overseen the delivery of more than 1000 tonnes of emergency relief. AusAID has also brought in five civilian medical teams (totalling over 100 Australian doctors and nurses) to provide urgent medical assistance. It has promptly sent medical supplies, such as medicines and equipment, so that work isn't hampered by stoppages and delays. It has also engaged mental health experts, child protection specialists, counsellors and health professionals to support Aceh's crippled health sector. In the past few days, AusAID has mobilised a team of specialists from Interplast Australia to work with the medical assistance company International SOS, Jakarta. This team will be deployed for at least three months.

The next phase of the humanitarian effort is cleaning up and rebuilding. Towards this, AusAID has provided 15 engineers and logistics experts to United Nations organisations, such as the World Food Programme. They are helping to set up refugee camps, telecommunications, and water and sanitation systems. Part of AusAID's ongoing response is protecting public health to

prevent further deaths from disease outbreaks.

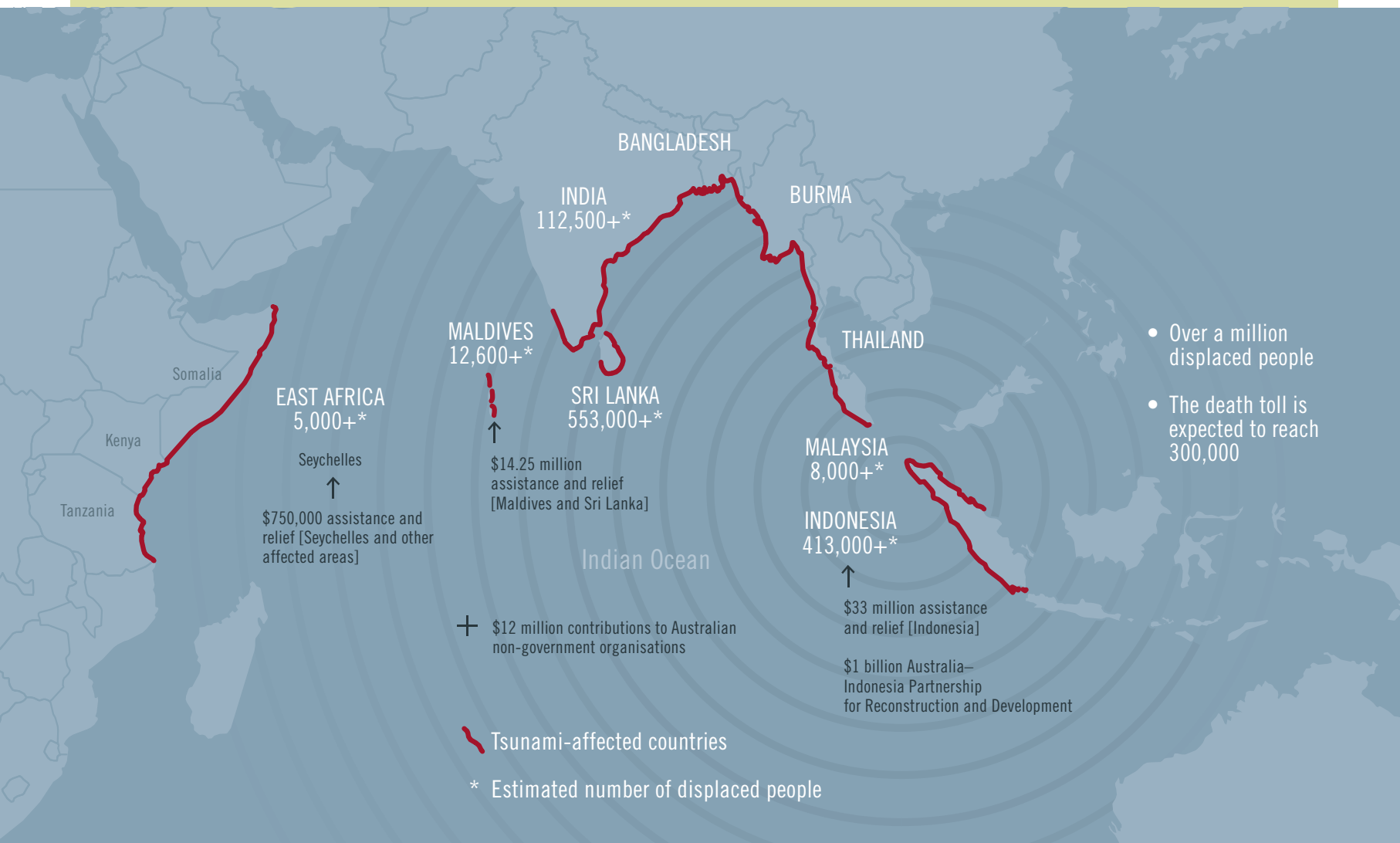
In the longer term, AusAID's reconstruction plans in Indonesia will focus on five key areas: education and child protection, supporting people getting back their livelihoods, governance, health and water and sanitation.

AusAID continues to work with credible national and international partners. For instance, with UNICEF, which it has helped to give education supplies to schools – and CARE with which it has worked to address water and sanitation issues in remote islands off west Sumatra.

AusAID's partners understand the importance of accountability and transparency in all activities. They know delivering aid demands integrity of the highest order. AusAID has checks and balances specifically designed to monitor the effective distribution of Australia's aid to those most in need. And such efforts position AusAID well to help its neighbours long into the future.

TOP: Unloading a UNICEF aid consignment consisting of bottles of water and 'school-in-a-box' kits, Male' airport, Maldives.
Photo: Jeremy Horner/Panos Pictures

TSUNAMI-AFFECTED REGION



ABOUT DONATIONS

AusAID has been overwhelmed by the generosity of Australians. It has received hundreds of phone calls from people around the country volunteering help or wanting to send goods to tsunami victims.

Since 26 December 2004, AusAID has registered more than 500 offers of assistance, ranging from goods and services to donations and semi-commercial proposals.

Handling donations and delivering aid is not as straightforward as people might imagine. 'Aid must be targeted to meet the priority needs of countries,' says Alan March, head of AusAID's Humanitarian and Emergency Response section. 'Offers of food, clothing and

livestock are often declined because they are inappropriate, too costly or bulky to transport and, in the case of livestock, do not meet quarantine standards.

'Medicines and pharmaceuticals are accepted if they have been requested. They must be checked for quality and have a shelf life of nine months or more. Cash is usually the best form of donation because money can be spent on items that are urgently needed. Where possible these items are sourced locally. This is quicker

and cheaper than transporting goods from other countries.'

It's regrettable that sometimes would-be donors feel disappointment and even frustration when their offers of help are not accepted. 'This is understandable,' says Alan, 'but most people agree that there is little point filling up storage warehouses with goods that are of little or no immediate benefit. It's also counterproductive to coordinate and distribute goods that are useless.

'Of course, needs and priorities constantly evolve so things that weren't needed previously may be later. As we come to the end of the emergency humanitarian phase of the relief effort, with its focus on sustaining life, attention is now shifting to medium term reconstruction. As priorities change, the list of what is needed, and who will be needed, will also change,' says Alan.

OTHER AID WORKS



The Australia Government has given \$12 million to Australian and local non-government organisations already working in tsunami-affected countries. Funds are for helping in the following areas.

» Australian Red Cross: To carry out field assessments in Sri Lanka and to send a logistician and a water and sanitation coordinator to Indonesia.

» International Federation of the Red Cross: To support activities in emergency relief such as the delivery of food and other items, health, water and sanitation, and to provide basic shelter, care and education for unaccompanied children, especially in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India and the Maldives.

» Oxfam Community Aid

Abroad: To provide clean water and sanitation facilities for the worst affected areas of Sri Lanka.

» World Vision: To distribute dry food baskets of rice, oil, tea, salt and a blanket, clothing, cooking sets and tents for 150,000 people in Sri Lanka. To distribute similar items to 40,000 families in Banda Aceh.

» Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific: To provide trauma counselling, conduct needs assessments for villages in Sri Lanka and to obtain chain saws and a walk-about sawmill to process downed trees and other wood wreckage for shelter/housing material.

» Care Australia: To distribute emergency relief kits, including food, water, clothing and kitchen items, to 35,000 survivors in Sri Lanka and distribute safe water systems in Indonesia. To provide water

purification tablets in India and help community recovery and rehabilitation in Thailand.

» Save the Children Fund: To provide food aid for 10,000 of the worst hit families in Aceh for 30 days, to supply basic medical supply kits and support 35 health clinics with equipment within the districts of Peidi, Simeulue, Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar and Bireuen.

» Christian Children's Fund: To set up child-centred spaces for about 6,000 children aged between 6–12 years in internally displaced people camps in the districts of Aceh Pidie, Bireuen, North Aceh and Meulaboh.

TOP: Galle, Sri Lanka. A tsunami survivor talks to relatives on a satellite phone to let them know she's safe. Phones were made available by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Photo: D Glinz/ICRC



AS THE SURREAL GRADUALLY BECAME REAL, THE WORLD RESPONDED WITH COMPASSION, CONCERN AND PRACTICAL HELP. TO DATE, AUSTRALIANS HAVE RAISED NEARLY \$260 MILLION – THE MOST EVER DONATED IN RESPONSE TO A SINGLE DISASTER.

LEFT: Maldives. Loading boats with sandbags to take to outer islands. The sandbags are for stemming the rising water levels. Boats are the main source of transport. Photo: Will Salter

BELOW: Two-year-old Fatamath Jauza with a plastic soap dish from the relief effort. For now it's also a replacement toy. Photo: Will Salter



PROTECTING THE CHILDREN

The effect of the tsunami on children is a cause of grave concern.

Thousands of children have lost their parents and brothers and sisters. They've lost their animals, their homes and personal items. Many are scared of the sea. They look over their shoulders and prefer to stay on high ground.

Since the tsunami, with AusAID's help, UNICEF has provided more than 100,000 blankets, sleeping mats and tents.

It's also distributed hundreds of thousands of water purification tablets and sachets of oral rehydration salts for sick children. Guarding against the spread of disease, which inevitably hits the very young first, is a high priority. With the World Health Organization, UNICEF has started a mass measles vaccination campaign for children aged

between 6 months and 15 years.

But it's the emotional and psychological damage inflicted on children that may be the greatest threat to their recovery. No one underestimates the dreadful strain many children are under or the enormity of the difficulties that lie ahead. It's one thing for aid agencies to meet children's basic needs for medicines, food and

shelter – quite another to deal with the emotional trauma.

And of course with so many children in bewildering circumstances there's also an urgent need to protect them from the unscrupulous. People traffickers and child abusers, eager to take advantage of the confusion caused by mass displacement and trauma, slyly move in. Such conditions are ideal for exploiting the young and vulnerable. For this reason, the Australian Government, through AusAID, has allocated extra funding to agencies, such as UNICEF, which has a mandate to protect children. UNICEF in turn works with national child protection authorities and key partners – for



example, the Red Cross and Save the Children.

The tsunami disaster has left Aceh with the largest number of orphaned children. The Indonesian Government has banned overseas adoptions to reduce the risk of further trauma caused by removing children from their homeland. A child protection officer, David Schiesher, deployed to Banda Aceh by AusAID, has found many of the children already absorbed into local families. 'Others have gone to camps for internally displaced people where they are under the care of child psychologists and social workers.' UNICEF and other organisations have set up 'child safe centres'. Staff at these centres are trained in trauma and grief



counselling as well as running sport and recreational activities.

The child safe centres, also set up in Sri Lanka, are playing a large part in children's recovery. Equally importantly they are reducing opportunities for children to fall prey to child traffickers and sexual abusers.

As the relief effort continues so do attempts to reunite parents and children. The Red Cross and other organisations in Banda Aceh have had several successes. 'Parents come to "tracing centres" to register their children's names and their own. Where possible, photos

of the children are duplicated and sent to the camps for internally displaced people. I am aware of about 20 children who have been reunited with their parents,' says David Schiesher.

The Indonesian Government will develop long-term plans for the protection and rights of children, including the care of orphaned and unaccompanied children. In the meantime it is heartening to see children, even those who have lost everything, begin to adjust to new lives. 'Kids are generally quite resilient. They are bouncing back. There is still a lot of grief of

THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT WILL DEVELOP LONG-TERM PLANS FOR THE PROTECTION AND RIGHTS OF CHILDREN, INCLUDING THE CARE OF ORPHANED AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN.

LEFT: An injured man with his granddaughter in the makeshift tent village on Kaafu Atoll, Maldives. Authorities must be watchful that unscrupulous people do not take advantage of the thousands of displaced children living in temporary camps. Photo: Will Salter
FAR LEFT: Thousands of children are homeless and emotionally scarred by the tsunami experience. Photo: Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures

course but the children are dealing with it. They are getting on with everything,' says David.

Along with other aid agencies, AusAID understands the importance of getting children back to school and normal routines. Apart from the learning aspects, school gives children much needed structure and a sense of social belonging. To this end, AusAID has supported the reopening of schools. EJ



Volunteers and survivors look for bodies in the ruins of Banda Aceh, northern Sumatra. Photo: Martin Adler/ Panos Pictures

IN THE WAKE OF DISASTER



Thai search and rescue teams use elephants to bring out bodies from areas not easily accessible.
Photo: Fredrik Naumann/Panos Pictures

THE TREMENDOUS POWER OF THE TSUNAMI CAUSED DESTRUCTION NEVER BEFORE WITNESSED IN RECENT HISTORY.

THE RELIEF EFFORT HAS BEEN SWIFT BUT THE ENORMITY OF THE TASK IS DAUNTING. IN THE WAKE OF A DISASTER OF THIS SCALE, WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS?



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[1] Doctors from Australia and New Zealand perform urgent operations in a makeshift field hospital, Banda Aceh, northern Sumatra. Photo: Dermot Tatlow/Panos Pictures

[2] The logistics of delivering aid, Sri Lanka. Working out the essential needs of survivors and how best to supply them is a constant challenge. Some people in need inevitably fall through the cracks because of the sheer scale and complexity of the disaster. Photo: Graeme Peel

[3] A boy builds storage boxes for the families whose homes were destroyed, the Maldives. Photo: Will Salter

[4] Cleaning up. Volunteers get rid of rubbish and debris, Thailand. Photo: Fredrik Naumann/Panos Pictures

[5] Part of the AusAID emergency response program, an aid truck arrives at a camp near Mutur, Sri Lanka. Photo: Lorrie Graham

[6] Trucks take corpses to the mortuary, Thailand. Photo: Fredrik Naumann/Panos Pictures

[7] Indonesian and foreign military aircraft fly into the small airport of Banda Aceh with emergency aid consisting of food, water, shelter and medicines. Photo: Dermot Tatlow/Panos Pictures

A BILLION DOLLARS FOR INDONESIA

Australia's Prime Minister John Howard and Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono have agreed to form an Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development. Australia is contributing \$1 billion over five years. This is in addition to Australia's existing and long standing aid program with Indonesia. The \$1 billion aid package consists in equal parts of grant assistance and loans.

The grant aid is to go to areas of greatest need, from small-scale reconstruction to re-establishing social and economic infrastructure in affected areas, training and rehabilitation.

A large scholarship program, providing support and training in areas such as engineering, health care, public administration and governance is also planned.

It's likely the loans will be used initially for reconstruction and rehabilitation of major infrastructure in tsunami-affected areas. The loans will provide \$500 million, interest-free, for up to 40 years, with no repayment on the principal for 10 years.

The Prime Minister John Howard and President Yudhoyono are overseeing the partnership arrangement. Australian officials will work with the Indonesian coordinating agency for the tsunami disaster, BAPPENAS.

The focus of Australia's assistance in the emergency phase is on health and water and sanitation. Australia wants most assistance to go to Banda Aceh with some small-scale assistance to the northwest coast, including the outlying islands of Nias, Batu, Banyak and Simeulue.



TOP: Decapitated palm trees along the coastline of Aceh Province, northern Sumatra, which bore the brunt of the tsunami. Photo: Martin Adler/Panos Pictures

LEFT: People from the tsunami-stricken island of Simeulue, off the coast of Aceh, receive water, dietary supplements and medical attention. Photo: Rob Walker



INDONESIA

Of all the countries so savagely battered by the tsunami, the northern parts of Indonesia suffered most. Like so many others in the world, Australians were shocked at the extent of the destruction and responded immediately. By the end of January 2005, Australia had sent 1,036 tonnes of humanitarian aid.

As Australia's relief effort continues in northern Sumatra, water and sanitation are high priorities. Given the trauma thousands have suffered, concerns about health are uppermost.

HEALTH SYSTEM DESTROYED

An AusAID medical assessment mission is in the devastated city of Banda Aceh as part of Australia's emergency response. One of its priorities is the welfare of patients in the city's psychiatric hospital. Gregson Edwards reports.

Located next to the general hospital not far from the city centre, the psychiatric complex was left in ruins by the lethal combination of earthquake and tsunami.

'When we pieced together what happened, it was a very tragic sequence of events,' says Sisa de Jesus, a psychiatric therapist contracted by AusAID to evaluate mental health needs.

'The earthquake struck at around 8 a.m. on Sunday, 26 December, collapsing the entire rear wall of some of the wards. Many of the patients fled.'

Staff feared the continuing tremors would bring other

structures crashing down, so they opened all the other wards and most of the remaining patients walked out.

'About an hour later, tsunami waters came roaring through. No one really knows exactly what happened next, except that the next shift of staff never reported for duty,' says Sisa de Jesus.

The disaster virtually destroyed Banda Aceh's public health system. In addition to physical damage to hospitals, clinics and other infrastructure, many employees were lost. Some 150 medical staff from the general hospital remain unaccounted for.

Before 26 December 2004,



the population of Banda Aceh was 400,000 – about half perished in the disaster. It can only be assumed that at least the same proportion of psychiatric patients, and carers, have also died.

When Sisa de Jesus first arrived at the hospital there were only 91 patients – down from the 371 registered on the day of the disaster. The number is now 145.

As a first step to getting the hospital running again, the Australian Defence Force First



LEFT: Sisa de Jesus outside the damaged psychiatric hospital. Photo: Rob Walker
ABOVE: Workers making a meal using camp stoves – the hospital kitchen is unusable. Photo: Rob Walker



SURFAID

SurfAid International is a loose-knit but highly organised band of enthusiastic wave chasers. It's also a dedicated group of doctors. AusAID's effective emergency aid to tsunami-stricken islands off Aceh and northern Sumatra owes a great deal to SurfAid's medical expertise and local knowledge.

AusAID's first assessment mission to the island of Simeulue, the closest landmass to the earthquake's epicentre, found that, miraculously, the population had survived. They were saved by their tradition of oral history. In 1907, a similar tsunami disaster occurred.

Because of stories handed down over the generations, the local people are acutely aware of changes in the sea, especially after earthquakes. From an early age islanders learn when the earth shakes to head for the hills.

Although few lives were lost, nearly 50 per cent of homes were destroyed or damaged. The sea swept away buildings, destroyed crops and smashed fishing boats. An estimated 22,000 people were left homeless and without adequate food or clean water they were vulnerable to starvation and the outbreak of disease.

Combat Engineers and the United Nations Development Programme have launched a combined clean-up operation. A Bali-based team of 14 Indonesian doctors, nurses, social workers and administrators has also recently arrived to boost regular staff numbers.

The challenges facing Sisa de Jesus and her team are immense. Building a new patient data base is just one of them. The hospital's patient records are destroyed, medical stores spoiled, and patients with illnesses, such as schizophrenia, have been without medication for weeks. The hospital's kitchens are unusable – the list goes on.

The trauma of the tsunami disaster will inevitably create new demands on Banda Aceh's principal psychiatric facility. With the support of AusAID, it will be restored to full operational capacity.

SurfAid has played an important part in AusAID's emergency response by delivering vital medical services to Simeulue and other island communities.

LEFT: Dr Ben Gordon (centre) with fellow SurfAid workers conducting immunisations and health checks in the village of Along, Simeulue. Although this village escaped the tsunami many others were destroyed. SurfAid is funded by AusAID to help combat the threat of disease. Photo: Rob Walker



One of the young survivors in Banda Aceh. Photo: Dermot Tatlow/ Panos Pictures



Sri Lanka's coastline was ravaged from north to south. About 30,000 people perished in the tsunami and hundreds of thousands are now destitute. AusAID's Bronwyn Coles was in Sri Lanka shortly after the catastrophe. With an AusAID team she visited some of the worst affected areas.



SRI LANKA

It wasn't until we were driving out of the national capital, Colombo, that there was any inkling of the true nature of the disaster.

But just 10 kilometres on, it was all too real.

Where the road south hugs the coast there's nothing but wreckage. Where once stood homes, offices and shops, there are slabs of concrete, twisted metal and debris.

As the road turns inland, the scene changes, businesses operate, people go about daily routines, everything seems normal. But, as the road nears the coast again, the scene changes to utter destruction.

Everywhere people scavenge for whatever they can.

Galle in the far south is one of the worst affected areas. The Sambodhi Home, which cares for physically and mentally disabled people, lost 38 residents in the disaster. The building was also engulfed in water and badly damaged. Australia's contribution of \$5,000 means ruined beds, mattresses and other items can be replaced. The building repairs have begun.

Recovery for the residents will not be as easy. 'Two days ago the fire brigade came to clean the room. As they opened their hosepipe, the water spurted out.

One boy just saw it and ran out – I had to calm him down,' says Premadasa Marasinghe, a former resident and now teacher in the home.

The exposed areas on the east coast were also badly hit. Near Mutur, AusAID is working with Care and other non-government organisations to bring emergency relief. From this small area alone, nearly 8,000 displaced families are living in camps, reliant on aid convoys.

While we visit, the aid convoy brings non-food items, including clothing, bottled water, soap, toothpaste and sleeping mats. Pregnant women receive their

goods first.

Near Ampara, we see camps, housing nearly 500 families. Alex Knox, an AusAID program development officer, is checking the coordination of the overall aid effort. 'It's very important to be here on the ground to see what other organisations are doing, and to make sure the aid is getting through to where it's most needed,' he says.

The assessment of the aid effort is positive. People are sheltered in tents and community buildings, they're receiving regular supplies of food and water, and schools are reopening.

Further south, near Batticaloa,

FAR LEFT: Mullaimunthal Village on the east coast was completely destroyed. K. Thangavelu, a hard-working fisherman for 40 years, had nearly finished building a new cement home with two rooms and a verandah. It's now back to the foundations and he has to start again. Photo: Lorrie Graham

LEFT: K. Radhika lost her arm at age 10 when her village was shelled during the long-running struggle between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

Now she is 16 and a survivor of the tsunami. 'Mother was running, we were running, the water came over our heads and I don't know what happened. Then mother came and carried me in. All the

household items went with the water, all the schoolbooks were washed away. Two of my relations died, and other children. We brought their bodies up and buried them in Batticaloa,' she says.

Photo: Lorrie Graham

BELOW: Alex Knox from AusAID (left) with Kavitha Kasynathan from Oxfam Community Aid Abroad lead a small group checking on relief distribution at camps near Ampara. Aid agencies are working together to ensure maximum efficiency in the relief effort. Photo: Lorrie Graham

RIGHT: The aid convoy – part of the emergency response program – brings urgently needed water.

Photo: Lorrie Graham



about 1,200 tsunami survivors are housed in a local Jesuit seminary. Oxfam Community Aid Abroad's health promotion coordinator, Therese Osland, was mobilised to the area from Sydney soon after the tsunami struck. Her job, funded by AusAID, is to work with community volunteers on a health program.

'The biggest issue in the camps is hygiene,' she says. 'We must make sure the water is clean and

that there are toilet facilities.' The threat of disease is a constant concern.

Another concern is the level of trauma. Therese tells of the pain people feel in answering questions such as, 'Where are your family?' and 'How many children do you have?' She also says, 'There are children who've lost both parents and just want to be held.'



AID TO SRI LANKA

The Australian Government has committed \$10 million for vital relief in Sri Lanka. Funds will be spent on addressing urgent food aid, shelter, public health issues and delivering water and sanitation. Relief aid is to go to those in need in all areas of the country.

Australia's aid to Sri Lanka includes sending:

- > a medical team on 30 December 2004 with expertise in infectious diseases and public health

- > four tonnes of medical supplies including protective gowns, gloves, syringes, surgical masks, mosquito nets and mobile phones
- > eight tonnes of medical equipment.

The Australian High Commission has also approved several immediate direct aid program grants to help disaster areas around Hikkaduwa, Batticaloa, Sainthamaruthu and Trincomalee.

MALDIVES

A medical team of 16, funded by AusAID, was sent to the Maldives to deal with the immediate crisis. The same flight carried 4,000 jerry cans, desperately needed to ferry clean water to outer islands. Teachers, engineers and marine specialists have also been sent out to help.

RIGHT: Hawwa Mohamed (in foreground) with survivors in Hurra Village, north Male' Atoll. They've lost their houses but their families are safe. Others have survived less unscathed.

Howlath Abdul Shamad (not shown) had just given birth in Male' when the tsunami struck. She returned home to Guraidhoo Island two days later to find her 18-month son drowned. Her son, her home and all her cash savings were washed away in a matter of minutes.

When AusAID's Stephanie Doust spoke with her, she was obviously still in shock. 'Her face motionless, she described her son's death so calmly, I wondered if I had misunderstood. This was a story repeated often over the five days I spent in the Maldives – loss of a relative or friend, coupled with complete financial ruin and nowhere to call home.' Photo: Will Salter



The Maldives is a country of 1,190 islands stretching over 800 kilometres. Think white sands, crystal clear blue waters, palm trees.

None of the islands sits more than 1.5 metres above sea level, so, when the tsunami reaching 4 metres hit at 9.00 a.m. on 26 December 2004, the entire country was submerged.

'Whereas the wave hit certain sections of the coast in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia [a localised disaster], we were completely covered by water – 100 per cent affected. It's a national disaster,' says Dr Ahmed Shaheed, Chief Spokesman for the Government of the Maldives.

'Although our death toll seems low – 82 confirmed dead and

26 missing – we only have a total population of 290,000, so, proportionately, the Maldives is the third most affected country.'

Four days before the tsunami struck, the United Nations voted to graduate the Maldives from 'least developed country' status. Infant mortality rates have dropped and education and literacy rates have risen – both signs of progress.

The Government of the Maldives estimates the disaster has set development back 20 years.

Walking along the beaches, previously pristine but now littered with rubble, crunching people's personal belongings underfoot, it's not hard to believe the prediction.

Temporary emergency shelters line the foreshores of many islands. On Guraidhoo, 215 people



will continue to live in tents for the next 10 months.

There is no more naturally occurring freshwater. Seawater has contaminated most of the low lying aquifers. Bottled water and temporary desalination plants (two rainwater tanks, a generator and a hose) have been shipped to each island. Sanitation remains a big problem with sewerage systems destroyed or washed out to sea.

Of 198 inhabited islands, 13 are evacuated. Some communities will never return.

But what about the future? At the ASEAN Tsunami Summit on 6 January 2005, President Gayoom of the Maldives and Australia's Prime Minister John Howard agreed on two immediate priorities: to get children back to school and to assess damage to the coral reef system. SD

LEFT: Hundreds of people will live in tents for at least six months and more likely 10. Photo: Will Salter

IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST



Science, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and James Cook University. Initial indications bode well – it appears there's some siltation but limited structural damage.

As with many of the other tsunami-affected countries, encouraging tourists back is the key to kick-starting the local economy. Locals and government officials alike want the world to hear the same message, 'The Maldives – still paradise – come and see'.

FAR LEFT: Mark Betheras, who normally teaches in Bright, Victoria, with grade 1 students at Thaajuddeen Primary School in Male'. With 40 per cent of the population under 30 years, it's a priority to get schools operating again. Experts also agree it's vital for recovery, especially for the young, to re-establish normal school routines. Photo: Will Salter

Fifteen Australian teachers are in the Maldives working alongside local teachers in the worst affected areas. They're also counselling. Teachers are mindful of the traumatic legacy of the tsunami and are helping children develop coping strategies.

Over 50 schools are seriously damaged, affecting around 3,000 students. Four engineers left Australia in late January on an AusAID-funded mission to assist

with repair and rebuilding. Books and other resources also need replacing.

Tourism is the chief source of revenue for the Maldives. It accounts directly for 33 per cent of the country's gross domestic product and as much as 70 per cent indirectly. Tourists are attracted by the natural environment, particularly the coral reefs which provide some of the best diving and snorkelling in the

world. Damage to the reefs would be catastrophic to the nation's economy.

The Government of the Maldives' concern about the condition of the reefs prompted Australia's Prime Minister John Howard to offer a team of Australian marine specialists to carry out a rapid assessment. The team is made up of eight scientists from the CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine

LEFT: Dr John Gunn from CSIRO examines the state of the coral reef at Mulaku Atoll, near Kolhufushi. Australia is well regarded for its expertise in the management of coral reefs and fisheries. Photo: Will Salter



A woman pours the remains of her home on the rubbish tip. She has no choice but to start again, Maldives. Photo: Will Salter



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