

Responding to the Asia Earthquake and Tsunamis

When Red Cross first heard news that an earthquake causing one of the worst ever tsunamis had hit the coast of Sumatra it immediately set the wheels in motion to help the victims of this natural disaster. Staff and volunteers from many Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies sprang into action.

- In the first hour of the disaster, Indonesia was affected
- In the second hour, Sri Lanka and India faced the waves
- In the third hour of the disaster, Thailand was affected
- In the fourth hour, the waves washed over the Maldives
- In the sixth hour, after waves had spread across the Indian Ocean, the Seychelles were hit by the Tsunami
- In the seventh hour of waves, Somalia and Kenya were affected

In almost all these places, Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies exist and they responded to the crisis, The countries where disaster has hit have not been alone in their efforts. Red Cross Societies from across the world have come together to also provide assistance. Over 100 Red Cross staff from other Red Cross Societies such as Australia, United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden and Japan are working alongside hundreds of local volunteers. This is the largest operation Red Cross has ever been a part of.

The assistance provided in the affected region by Red Cross staff and over 9,000 volunteers has included:

- Evacuating survivors and helping the injured;
- Collecting and carrying dead bodies;
- Providing first aid and emergency relief items such as tents, blankets, clean water and food;
- Providing medical supplies such as medicine, disinfectant and bandages to hospitals and setting up field hospitals;
- Distributing essential household kits. Each kit includes a bucket, 3 bed sheets, 2 plastic mats, a cooking set and soap. Families have also received lanterns and clothing;
- Dispatching 14 Emergency Response Units with experts in health care, water safety, logistics and telecommunications;
- Providing safe water supplies and sanitation (toilet) facilities in camps, building water storages to prevent the outbreak of disease;
- Assisting and supporting families in Red Cross camps
- Setting up mobile tracing units to help separated relatives find each other;
- Providing counselling and support to help people deal with the shock, fear, pain and suffering from this trauma



Red Cross volunteers unload relief supplies to be distributed to victims of the tsunami. The Indonesian Red Cross is distributing food and non-food items, such as shelter items, blankets, clothes and hygiene items. *Photo: Ian Woolverton/International Federation*

A Local Response Helps a Global Organisation

As soon as word of the disaster reached Australia, Australian Red Cross joined the emergency appeal launched by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to enable the public to make donations which have and will continue to provide assistance to those in so much need. As of 21 January 2005, the appeal has raised \$74.5 million.

Tsunami Education Kit

The donations mean Red Cross can continue to help provide the basic needs of shelter, food and clean water supplies to tsunami victims. It also means Red Cross will be able to help these people who lost everything to, rebuild their shattered lives and communities for many years to come.

It is not only our money that will directly assist the Red Cross. Australian Red Cross, like other Red Cross Societies in the world, has specially trained staff and volunteers who have been requested for their expertise and sent to the affected areas to assist. As of January 21 2005, Australian Red Cross has sent:

- 6 aid workers to Indonesia who are specialists in water sanitation, health and logistics (that is, or coordination of relief efforts). Phillip Charlesworth has been sent to Indonesia as a Disaster Management delegate. To read about his experience go to www.redcross.org.au, click on the Asia quake and tsunami icon and follow links to stories from the field.
- 2 aid workers to Sri Lanka. One is a health worker and the other is a tracing worker. Tracing workers help to reunite families separated by conflict or disaster. David Overlack has been sent to Sri Lanka as a Health aid worker. Hang Vo has been sent to Sri Lanka as a Tracing delegate. To read about their experiences go to www.redcross.org.au, click on the Asia quake and tsunami icon and follow links to stories from the field.
- An assessment team to the Maldives to find out what assistance is required on the ground

The Red Cross' response to the Asia Tsunami disaster has reached some 300,000 affected people within the first 2 weeks of the disaster.

For a list of the assistance provided to each country go to www.redcross.org.au, click on the Asia quake and tsunami icon and follow links to the latest tsunami update.

Assistance for the Long Term

With volunteers in local communities in affected countries, not only were Red Cross and red Crescent there in the first minutes and hours of the disaster, the organisation will remain focused on assisting the affected communities for months and years to come

The organisation will continue to work under its Fundamental Principles to work with those affected by the disaster to meet their needs in a fast and flexible way including:

Working with our member Societies in each of the affected countries on plans for the future based on their current and emerging health, safety and economic needs.

- Focussing on people regaining and rebuilding their lives by strengthening the ability of local communities to sustain themselves based on their local talents and resources and on their needs which are different in many places.
- Rebuilding and strengthening our local Red Cross groups to deal effectively with future disaster prevention and relief.
- Working with the Maldives Government for the establishment of a National Society in the only country of the region still without a permanent Red Cross/Red Crescent presence.



Some 28 local staff from the destroyed public health centre are working with the German Red Cross at the centre, which treats around 170 people per day, mostly for infectious diseases, respiratory problems, diarrhoea, abscesses, infected wounds and trauma.

Photo: Ian Woolverton/International Federation