

**Press Release**

Bangkok, June 23, 2005

***Tsunami Recovery Challenges After Six Months
UN Supports Thailand in Building Back Better***

In Thailand the emergency phase was considered to be mostly over within two months of the tsunami, and the country is now well into the recovery phase. With the Government moving towards longer term **rehabilitation and recovery** in four key areas, the United Nations Country Team is also implementing programmes in these fields of social protection, livelihood recovery, environmental rehabilitation and disaster preparedness.

The tsunami disaster on December 26, 2004 was the **worst ever natural disaster** to strike Thailand, killing 5,395 people, both Thai and foreign nationals. Over 58,500 people were affected in the Andaman provinces, and nearly 3,000 remain unaccounted for six months on. The disaster also destroyed livelihoods and property, caused serious environmental impact and psychological trauma.

The Royal Thai Government is widely acknowledged to have led an **effective response**, encompassing prompt provision of health services, construction of temporary shelter and permanent homes, use of military assets to support the whole tsunami-affected region, compensation to survivors, and a major forensic body identification operation. Thailand did not appeal for international financial assistance, but welcomed technical assistance in support of its relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

The United Nations system in Thailand **immediately mobilized** both funds and a wide variety of technical expertise for emergency relief operations in the first two weeks, worth 2.6 million USD. UN Country team agencies provided assistance in many sectors through its specialized agencies, from restoration of water/sanitation services for 2,000 families in temporary shelter; procurement of equipment to facilitate body identification; survival inputs to more than 3,000 farmers and fisherpeople; emergency rations to 3,000 vulnerable families; as well as working with Government partners on several key rapid needs assessments.

There has been no need for large-scale food assistance, a relatively small proportion of the population has been displaced, and there have been only localized and quickly restored disruptions to water/sanitation, health services and education in Thailand. However, the tsunami caused significant **psychological trauma** for children and adults. More than 1,200 children lost one or both parents while thousands of families have lost livelihoods and property. To ensure **protection** for orphaned and vulnerable children, UNICEF is training social workers to identify signs of distress, neglect and exploitation, while field staff regularly visit families to monitor the situation and assist the authorities in responding to their needs. Some 150,000 children in the six affected provinces have benefited from UNICEF-supported psychosocial recovery activities.

It is important to emphasize that recovery and reconstruction is a long-term process, and the UN Country Team has been delivering technical assistance oriented towards mid-long term recovery, with a '**build back better**' approach, using the tsunami as an opportunity to help communities develop beyond the process of rebuilding what has been destroyed.

Thailand now has an opportunity to ensure that sustainability is a key focus of **livelihood development** in the fishing and tourism industries. For example, FAO provided fishing inputs to fisherfolk in order to assist their income generation and restore livelihood; UNDP is working with local government and NGOs on community-based livelihood recovery for vulnerable Sea Gypsy and Muslim groups, as well as establishing community-managed finance for 30 villages; ILO and UNDP are supporting skills development and income-generating activities for tourism workers and small businesses in Phuket and Phang Nga provinces.

This approach can also be applied to policy and practice in **coastal zoning management**. In support of this, FAO is undertaking in-depth assessments in coastal fisheries, agriculture and forestry, to develop viable approaches to offset the impact of marine disasters and build back a sustainable livelihood system, and UNEP is promoting eco-tourism initiatives in national parks.

‘Building back better’ in Thailand will also require the **participation** of all sectors in society: marginalised and vulnerable communities need equal access to healthcare, other social services, land title and consultation on land use. Foreign migrant workers in construction, fishing and tourism were among those most affected by the tsunami. IOM is building the capacity of the Thai authorities to respond to the primary healthcare and sanitation needs of these workers, as well as providing over 20 tonnes of relief items in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. UNFPA is working to meet reproductive health needs and promote HIV/AIDS prevention in both the local Thai and Burmese migrant communities, through mobile medical teams and community health volunteers. Many of these projects have only recently been launched and will be able to demonstrate impacts later in the year.

The UN is committed to establishing **transparency and accountability**, both in its own procedures and in helping to set up the Government of Thailand’s donor assistance database. A UN financial tracking database is already available on the ReliefWeb internet site, and the Thailand Country Team has also designed a matrix to monitor the financial aspects of all its tsunami projects. This work in progress can be accessed through www.un.or.th/tsunami.

Looking ahead, the United Nations and the Government of Thailand are working together to prepare for and **mitigate the impacts** of future disasters in the region. Initiated by UNOCHA, a national ‘lessons learned’ workshop was held in Bangkok at the end of May (one of four in the tsunami affected region), followed by a regional event in Indonesia, attended by a senior delegation from the Thai Government. Recommendations and follow-on actions were suggested, including strengthening institutional and legal frameworks for disaster preparedness and response; cooperating regionally on establishing multi-hazard early warning systems; and promoting risk awareness and emergency preparedness. UNESCO is also supporting long-term community disaster preparedness initiatives, while WHO is contributing to Thailand’s improvement of health services in disaster-prone areas.

For more details of specific recovery programmes being implemented by the UN agencies in Thailand, please contact Amanda Pitt, the United Nations Country Team Public Information Officer, on tel. +66 (0)2 288 1940, or at amanda.pitt@undp.org. The Public Information Officer will be happy to facilitate contact with other UN agencies.