

## UNDAC TEAM THAILAND

UNDAC Field Report – Ranong and Pang-Nga Provinces 31.12.2004 – 1.1.2005

### **GENERAL**

In addition to the massive destruction, one of the most striking observations during this field visit was to see the extensive effort of national Thai volunteers in helping search and rescue, working in the mortuary, and (donating) and distributing food, bottled water and clothes. Otherwise the team's visit was short, randomly interviewing officials, victims or volunteers ad hoc bases. There were major problems with the translation in the first day, but improved during the second day as the team found a diving instructor with not only good English skills, but also good organization skills.

The general view of the relief work was chaotic with clear lack of coordination, cooperation and communication. There seems to be also internal coordination problems between the national operations center (in Phuket) and the field operations centers. The focus is still on recovering dead bodies, as the likelihood of finding survivors is very small, and the starting forensic work. Although it seems that the pressure from foreign governments on the Thai MoFA on recovery and the forensic operation is all-consuming, initial clearing and immediate rehabilitation work is underway (electricity, cleaning of the water beds, clearing of debris and rubble). The main function at least in Khao Lak in the Pang-Nga Province is still search and rescue, identification of victims and tracing.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2005, the Prime Minister announced on TV that Thailand will not request any international assistance other than forensic experts. Thailand also announced its contribution to Sri Lanka (\$ 100,000) and Maldives (\$ 30,000). In separate meetings with 3 Thai Ministers (Interior; Natural Resources and Environment; Social Development and Human Security), they have all indicated that Thailand welcomes international assistance although it is not appealing.

The team was given some preliminary figures on compensation of families by government. The compensation plan is still not entirely clear, however the following gives a general idea:

- 1) 2,000 baht per family (entire population in the affected region) 2,000 baht for victims with minor injuries; 5,000 baht if victim is hospitalized;
- 2) 43,000 baht per deceased family member for each family (68,000 baht if a head of household is deceased). This stipend consists of contributions from various Government offices and NGOs, including 20,000 baht from Prime Minister's office, 15,000 baht from the Dept of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, and 8,000 baht from 2 NGOs. However, it seems that only once missing relatives are confirmed dead, will this compensation be given.
- 3) 25,000 baht for a damaged house, although this figure may go up;
- 4) IFRC also indicated that Red Cross will appeal for 4-5 new boats/community through the Princess Sirindhorn fund.

## **RANONG**

Ranong is one of the most under populated provinces with 106,000 people consisting of mainly Thai Muslim, Myanmar and Cambodian population. Over half of the population consists of economic migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia who have no legal status in Thailand and therefore would not be eligible for compensation. Most people earn their living through fishing using nets and narrow, long boats with engines. The fishermen in Baan Taleno village lost 133 boats (worth 3 million baht). Other means of income for this population is (partly destroyed) coconut and cashew plantations. Those who were interviewed agreed that their greatest need was to restore their livelihoods – boats and nets. An old man said that he could live even in a small house as long as he has a boat for fishing. The other needs included housing, materials for housing (wood, cement, bricks, roof tiles), psychosocial support and some kitchen utensils.

## **PHANG-NGA**

The Pang-Nga Province is the hardest hit province of the 6 on the west coast. As intensive search and rescue is still going-on and the number of death is continuously rising: the famous Khao Lak beach area with hundreds of hotels was destroyed by the tsunami waves – more than 50 hotels were destroyed with about 6,000 rooms and over 4,000 hotel guests and staff dead or missing. The rebuilding of the hotels will take an estimated 6 – 12 months. The highest priority in the area is still recovery of the bodies, but some clearing and reconstruction work has already started.

Several fishing villages were hit and destroyed by the tsunami. The team visited a few temporarily sheltered communities (villages between Khao Lak and Takuo Pa):

### **Ban Nian**

36 families (the usual number of Thai family is five, but these families lost some members) were temporarily staying in a big warehouse, close to the Morgen (sp?) hill tribes who were sleeping in tents nearby.

The families had already received 1,000 baht/family, cooking utensils and food commodities (rice, noodles, canned fish, vegetable oil, nampla, biscuits and juices). There was an adequate supply of bottled drinking water; water and sanitation facilities also seemed to be adequate. The local population has no other source of income, and does not have any idea when they could start working again. Their priority needs include going back and re-building their homes, getting work and fresh vegetables and fruits (at the moment their food basket consists mainly of instant and dry food).

### **Ban Sak**

35 – 40 families are located in temporary shelters built from steel sheets. The expected duration of stay is about six months before being transferred to permanent houses, although there is as yet no clear plan as to how this will be done. The people were working in rubber plantations in the hills, so they didn't lose their livelihoods.

They were in need of a canteen to store fresh food and milk, but don't require any international assistance at present.

### **Meetings in TAKUA PA:**

Yan Yao temple in Takuo Pa was selected for the storage of the recovered dead bodies. A lot of activities around this (forensic work, victim identification, tracing) is concentrated to Takuo Pa.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, Yan Yao was a scene of horror with estimated 4,000 bodies lying all over the temple area being investigated by big number of volunteers who were trained on how to do counting, labeling, basic first investigation and identification of the bodies. Another group of volunteers (including foreigners) and Thai soldiers were carrying dry ice on top of the bodies desperately trying to delay their decay (with very poor success). The lack of body bags was seen in the effort of packing the bodies in trash or plastic bags.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, at least four forensic teams (from Australia, New Zealand, Holland and France) had started their work. The coordination of these teams is in Phuket and the teams had agreed to follow the international DVI (Disaster Victim Identification) guidelines. UNDAC is a member of this coordination team in Phuket.

The team met briefly with the Ministers of Natural Resources and Justice. He gave a very positive briefing about 500 shelters being built, and another 1,500 more expected and welcomed the support of the UNDAC mission. Two schools were being rebuilt and work was on-going to ensure clean underground water (which was polluted with salt water, mud, debris and decay by the tsunami).

### **OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the time being and at least for the next few months to come, the mission was told that the communities have enough food. However, the distribution still appears somewhat irregular, uncoordinated, sporadic and unplanned. There was no knowledge where the food came from and when the next supplies were coming. Some of the food supplied was not of very good nutritional quality (instant food), and there was lack of fresh food. The storage of the fresh food is also a problem.

The communities were supplied with bottled drinking water, but it seems that the potable water is being secured soon.

The only sanitation problems were the debris and dead bodies in the beach area, but this is also in the process of being resolved.

There was no evidence of epidemics, or major health problems. There was also no evidence of lack of medicine or medical supplies of medical personnel.

People need to get back their jobs and guarantee their livelihoods. The fishermen need boats and nets. Thousands of people in the tourism industry have lost their jobs, and it will most probably take long time before the tourism will recover. Many of the people need houses, and are ready to move back to their original lands. But as the people have little other means to earn income, the coping mechanisms will be stretched.

Vulnerable groups, as migrants and minority Muslims outside the tourist area, might need some special focus.