



TO: OCHA-GENEVA

FROM: JOANA MERLIN-SCHOLTES  
UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN THAILAND

SUBJECT: **INITIAL FIELD SITUATION REPORT**

DATE: 27 December 2004 (20:00 Bangkok time)

## **I. Situation**

Most of the 400 km Western coastline (including numerous islands in the Andaman Sea) has been devastated by the large tsunami that struck South-Asia yesterday morning at about 10:00 a.m in Thailand. The provinces of Ranong, Phang-Nga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang and Satun have been severely affected. The combined population of these provinces is 1.9 million, many living in coastal areas. Phuket was declared an emergency area.

As of 14:00 on 27 December, the Government's initial estimates are that 431 people have died, over 5,000 have been injured, and tens of thousands are stranded. The government does not yet have estimates for the number of missing, the number of people without shelter or displaced.

The structural damage is extensive along the beach areas and in some areas up to a kilo meter inland. Some islands, including Phi Phi, were completely washed out. Besides the tourist sites that are getting the attention in the media, many poorer fishing villages have been completely destroyed by the tsunami. Transport, electricity and telephone lines are severely damaged. Mobile phone communication is sporadic. Hundreds of boats have sunk (both fishing boats and ferries), others washed up on the shores.

## **II. National Response**

The entire government and military apparatus is now mobilized in a massive emergency response operation. Thailand has however little experience in dealing with this type of natural disasters and is clearly struggling to cope at this point given the unimaginable magnitude of the crisis.

Priority is currently given to search and rescue operations, trying to locate and evacuate thousands of people (especially foreign tourists) stranded on small islands and remote beaches. Priority is also given to care for the thousands of injured, and the identification and repatriation of bodies. Clean up operations have not yet started.

The Government has set up crisis centres in Phuket as well as Pangnga, Ranong and Krabi, primarily dealing with tens of thousands of foreign tourists needing to be repatriated/evacuated.

### **III. Request for International Support**

It is important to first note that the MFA has requested us not to use the term “international appeal” for these items, but prefers calling it a discussions about needs and a request for direct support from the UN.

At a briefing today at 16:00, the government asked for international support. Clearly overwhelmed by the task, the MFA asked donors to “bring whatever you can, as long as you coordinate with us”. The items listed were:

- a) Search and rescue, especially helicopters, personnel and experts
- b) Forensic medical teams
- c) Medical supplies (especially for treating skin lesions and flesh wounds)
- d) Body bags
- e) Formalin

The Government also asked for support from the UN to coordinate the relief effort and the international support. They have agreed to the fielding of an UNDAC team and welcome the arrival tomorrow of 3 people sent by OCHA to assist in coordination and assessment work.

### **IV. Government coordination arrangements**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up an “Ad Hoc Task Force on Tidal Wave Disaster” to coordinate foreign assistance, and appointed a Humanitarian Relief Coordinator. Channels for delivery of International Assistance are still being set up, as well as logistics and distribution systems. The MFA has set up a three-person team to liaise with the UN.

### **V. International Pledges and Contributions**

At the briefing for embassies and international organizations this afternoon, donor countries were mostly concerned with the wellbeing of their citizens. Only Switzerland mentioned an offer of search and rescue dogs.

Other UN agencies: WHO offered support with forensic teams, UNDP 100,000 in initial support, UNICEF USD 150,000 in initial support, plus tracing of abandoned children, and WFP USD 1.5 million in food aid.

UNRC Thailand

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