



TO: OCHA-GENEVA

FROM: JOANA MERLIN-SCHOLTES
UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN THAILAND

SUBJECT: **DISASTER, FIELD SITREP 2**

DATE: 28 December 2004 (14:00 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 the morning of 26 December 2004 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 has been declared an emergency area, but indications are now that Phang-Nga is the worst affected province.

As of noon on 28 December, the Government estimate that over 900 have died, over 5,000 have been injured, and tens of thousands are stranded, and many more displaced. The Prime Minister last night predicted a death toll of over 2,000. 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 most of 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. Reports are coming in regarding water shortages and contamination. Some people have not had access to any clean water since the disaster struck, according to press reports.

II. National Response

The entire government and military apparatus is mobilized in a massive emergency response operation. The navy's only aircraft carrier is stationed outside Phuket supporting search and rescue efforts. 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 (including many 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.

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre is assisting the government with initial damage and needs assessments.

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 yesterday at 16:00, the government asked for international support. Clearly overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, 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 (both normal and extra large)
- 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 later today of five 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 understandably focusing on the need to repatriate their citizens. Switzerland mentioned an offer of search and rescue dogs. Later indications are that the US and Australia are offering support to the rescue efforts.

VI. Status of UN Support

Yesterday morning the RC made an initial offer of assistance to the Government on behalf of the UN Country team in Thailand. Immediately there after the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced to the media that Thailand very much appreciates the offer of support from the UN, specifically mentioning the need for immediate assistance in the search and rescue efforts.

A five person OCHA UNDAC team is due to arrive this afternoon to assist in coordination effort and to support assessment efforts already underway.

The UN Disaster Management Team met this morning and shared the following information about specific support at this initial stage:

- ADB has issued a letter to the Ministry of Finance that they are on standby for any assistance that may be requested.
- FAO offered support to fishery and farming communities (medium term)
- UNDP will today transfer USD 100,000 to the MFA in initial support to relief operations, particularly in terms of transport of emergency relief.
- UNFPA will make an immediate contribution of USD 50,000 for planning, implementation of emergency response (staff, transport, local procurement of health and hygiene supplies, needs assessment costs, etc). More assistance will be provided based on UNDAC needs assessment that will take place shortly.
- UNICEF will do the same with USD 150,000, plus subsequent support for tracing of abandoned children, and conducting needs assessment in the three affected provinces where they already have programmes (Ranong, Satun, and Trang)
- UNOPS is ready to assist all agencies in operations and implementation
- WFP will provide an initial USD 500,000 in food aid, and more after 20 days if Thailand joins the Regional Operations for further support.
- WHO offered support with forensic teams and management of dead bodies [at yesterday's meeting with MFA].

The UNRC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have agreed to set up a special bank account for a “UN Emergency Relief Fund” to be managed by the MFA Humanitarian Relief Coordinator, through which at least the initial support from the UN agencies will be channelled. This Fund will provide a quick and flexible mechanism to support the relief operations, logistics support, transport of relief items and personnel, search and rescue operations, and medical supplies. Another Trust Fund account is being set up by the MFA for larger contributions from bilaterals and others.

UNRC Thailand

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