



TO: OCHA-GENEVA

FROM: JOANA MERLIN-SCHOLTES
UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN THAILAND

SUBJECT: **DISASTER, FIELD SITREP 8**

DATE: 26 January 2005

I. SITUATION

The Royal Thai government has provided an effective and flexible response to the largest natural disaster in Thailand's history. The massive forensic operation continues, and some bodies are still being uncovered. Meanwhile, the situation has rapidly progressed from rescue and relief to clean-up, recovery and reconstruction.

The Department of Disaster Mitigation and Prevention of the Ministry of Interior recently released casualty and damage estimates from the tsunami. The casualty figures, as of January 17, stand at 5,322 dead, 8,457 injured and 3,144 missing. The severely affected areas cover 308 villages in 79 tambons (sub-districts) of 24 districts. In these areas, 12,068 households with a total of 54,672 people are considered to have been directly affected through loss of, or injury to, a family member. Phang-Nga, the most heavily impacted province, reported 61 villages in 15 tambons of 6 districts as severely affected. In Phang-Nga alone, over 4,000 households, or more than 19,000 people were directly affected. Over 3,600 houses were totally destroyed and almost 3,200 houses were partly damaged, with approximately 70% of the damage in Phang-Nga province.

Losses to livelihoods have presumably affected a much larger number, with some estimates of over 120,000 people affected by losses in the fishery sector alone.

The Department of Disaster Mitigation and Prevention further reports that estimated damage to the Fishery sector is over 36 million dollars with half of the losses in Phang-Nga. The livestock and agricultural sectors are estimated to have sustained losses of 1.2 million and 6.2 million dollars respectively with over 90% of the losses in Phang-Nga. The losses in the business sector are currently estimated at nearly 390 million dollars, excluding the losses to 98 damaged hotels and resorts in Phang-Nga, which have yet to be estimated. Damages to civil infrastructure, including roads, bridges and piers are estimated at 7.8 million dollars, with almost 70% of the damages in Phang-Nga.

Tsunami related losses in the tourism sector have spread far beyond the directly affected coastal areas. There are reports that most of the hotels in the tsunami-hit provinces are managing to fill just 10% of their 35,000 rooms, while international passenger arrivals at Phuket international airport have reduced by 88% from the same period last year. The Tourism Ministry estimates that employment for some 200,000 workers is at risk. Another estimate by the Tourism Authority of Thailand suggests the affected provinces stand to lose more than one billion US dollars in tourism revenue, or five million tourists, in the first quarter of this year. It is further estimated that the three main tourist destinations of Phuket, Krabi and Phang-Nga would have generated over three billion U.S. dollars this year, had no disaster occurred. In Thailand, where tourism contributes 5-6% to total GDP, the estimated tsunami impact on the national economy translates into a drop in forecast GDP growth for 2005 from 6.3% to 5.6%. As one report clearly states, "People in the six Andaman sea provinces do not only need humanitarian aid but also jobs and opportunities to earn a living and rebuild their livelihoods."

Education in the coastal areas was also severely affected. Four schools were completely destroyed and more than one-hundred were either directly damaged or lost students or teachers. However all schools had reopened by January 10 and the majority had actually reopened at the start of the school year on January 4. Children from destroyed schools are attending alternative nearby schools or are having their lessons in makeshift arrangements. However, of greatest concern is that only around 75% of children are attending school. The 25% of children who are not going to schools are reportedly staying at home because of fear and distress.

Local governments in the affected areas are currently looking for a balance between public safety and rapid restoration of tourism activities. One proposal from the Krabi Government is for land on Phi Phi and other islands up to 15 metres above sea level to be labeled as vulnerable to tsunamis and therefore left as an open zone. According to the plan, which was submitted to the Interior Ministry recently, the risk areas will become open zones for recreational purposes while schools and hospitals must strictly be located on land higher than 15 metres above sea level. There have also been reports of illegal vendors protesting government bans on their activities at Kamala and Patong beaches in Phuket; however Phuket city issued an ordinance to keep the vendors off beaches after the tsunamis demolished unlicensed beachfront stalls. The city maintains that no vendors' stalls will be allowed back onto the beaches in the future.

The rush to provide assistance to local communities has overlooked the need for a participatory approach towards disaster recovery. Some civil groups in Thailand have called on the government to adopt more community-oriented policies for assisting victims. A professor from Mahidol University is quoted as saying that "locals are getting hit by a second tidal wave, which we might call the "Tsunami of Mercy."

II. NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Royal Thai Government continues to provide a broad package of relief including direct compensation for losses, tax and loan reprieves for families and businesses, and low interest rate recovery loans. The Government has also eased regulations to expedite disbursement of benefits. The response of the Thai government has been quite extensive, so only a limited update is presented here. Please see SitRep #7, for more detailed information on the national response.

In the wake of the Tsunami, the Department of Disaster Mitigation and Prevention (DDMP) is proposing a very proactive approach to disaster management including awareness raising for the general public and public authorities, and application of a Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) framework to actively engage communities in the process of disaster risk reduction. The DDMP is further proposing the installation of early warning systems for earthquakes and tsunamis; regional and global technical cooperation and technology transfer for best practices and technologies; and integrating disaster risk management into national social and economic development planning.

The Thai Education Ministry has reportedly begun preparing material to teach students what they need to know about tsunamis as well as what they can do to protect themselves in the event of future natural disasters. The syllabuses, from the Fundamental Education Commission (FEC), are expected to be ready for the May 2005 school semester. The FEC plans to open a tsunami operations centre in the building of the former General Education Department building.

A Tsunami alert post is reportedly under construction by the Thai Navy on Miang island in the Similan archipelago. The facilities will include a sea level measuring device, a satellite transmission receiver and a device to monitor waves. Ten naval officers with knowledge of tsunamis will man the outpost on the island, off the coast of Phang-Nga. The facility is expected to be up and running by

March. There are also reports that The National Disaster Warning Committee has been assigned with carrying out work on a tsunami alert system, with an enhanced role for the media. It has been noted that television and radio have to play a more active role in the future by disseminating timely and accurate information when disaster situations emerge.

A Ministerial Meeting on Regional Cooperation on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements will be held 28-29 January in Phuket. The meeting will be hosted by the Thai Prime Minister, and over 40 countries, led by Foreign Ministers from the ASEAN countries, with Japan, China, Korea, USA, major European countries, as well as senior UN officials, all participating. One proposal from the Royal Thai Government will be the establishment of an Indian Ocean Tsunami Early Warning Centre at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, a regional center based in Bangkok.

III. COUNTRY-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The focus of UN agencies and NGOs continues to be one of support for the on-going Royal Thai Government response and recovery efforts. In addition to conducting assessment missions in partnership with various ministries, one of the key areas of UNDP activity has been to assist with coordination of international efforts. The government has established a Sub-Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance with three task forces (or working groups): task force 1 focuses on coastal and marine environmental restoration efforts; task force 2 focuses on geophysical hazards including seismicity, sink-holes, landslides, and salinity intrusion; and task force 3 focuses on livelihoods restoration issues. UNDP has taken a lead role in supporting the coordination of both the livelihoods and coastal restoration task forces.

As part of these coordination efforts the existing "UN in Thailand" website has been expanded to facilitate information sharing on tsunami-related matters. The website, which is accessible directly at <http://www.un.or.th/tsunami/> or through a link on the "UN in Thailand" site (<http://www.un.or.th/>), provides a platform to share relevant assessment reports, updates and other information related to tsunami recovery efforts.

A joint UNDP, UN-HABITAT, UNESCO, UNHCR, ILO, IOM and UNEP assessment team has completed an assessment mission on human settlements. The assessment was conducted to determine needs of the government and communities, and to identify possible areas of collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations and the UN Country Team for the recovery phase of the tsunami disaster. An assessment report will be released this week.

UNICEF will maintain a field presence for the next six months of 15 staff working from four temporary offices. Specialists in child protection, health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation and emergency coordination are being recruited, to ensure technical support to the government for the next phase of the operation.

UNICEF has procured school supplies, recreational materials and early childhood kits for the 100 most affected schools and nurseries valued at more than US\$ 300,000. Distribution has started and will be completed in the next week. UNICEF has supported repair of schools and other buildings for temporary use as classrooms, shelters and latrines. In addition to school equipment, funds have been provided to hire temporary school labour, as well as to provide temporary transport. UNICEF is providing home-based psycho-social support that will need to be increased in the coming months, to reduce the number of school children reportedly staying at home because of fear and distress.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) will provide US \$500,000 in food aid to 8,000 child tsunami victims and 2,000 migrant workers' families in Thailand's six Andaman coastal provinces. The first batch of food, including 240 tonnes of rice, 56 tonnes of canned fish, and 24 tonnes of oil, will be sent to the damaged provinces under WFP's school feeding programme.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is ready to disburse its first tranche of financial aid to tsunami-hit fishermen and farmers in the six southern provinces. The FAO expects to help about 8,700 fishermen and farmers. This first phase of the FAO's livelihood rehabilitation programme for tsunami victims, will provide over US 400,000 dollars for procurement of new fishery equipment and to pay for technical assistance from experts over the next 10 months. It will also cover new agricultural supplies, such as seeds for farmers.

The Special Coordinator of the UN Secretary-General for Humanitarian Assistance to the Tsunami Affected Communities, Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, had meetings on 19 January with the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, and the Thai Minister of Interior, H.E. Mr. Pokin Polakul. The Foreign Minister outlined the following priority areas for technical assistance: a) rehabilitation of natural resources and marine parks, b) reconstruction, c) body identification, and d) development of an early warning system. The Special Coordinator stated that the UN would be ready to provide technical assistance including expertise on early warning systems to Thailand and to the other affected countries. She also added that as the rehabilitation process is starting, after the first weeks of relief operations, it will be essential to have effective management and coordination of assistance.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) will be holding an Emergency Task Force meeting and an Extraordinary session of the WTO Executive Council in Phuket, Thailand on 31 January and 1st February, to assess the situation in the countries affected by the tsunami and to submit a plan of action to the Council.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The Royal Thai Government has decided not to appeal for international financial assistance; however, the government will accept foreign technical assistance such as equipment, tools, training, as well as offers to build schools or hospitals for the poor. To this end, the UN agencies in Thailand have participated in the UN Flash Appeal to facilitate technical assistance activities. To show their support for the region, The Royal Thai Government plans to share half of the material donations for Thai tsunami victims with Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

In recent meetings between the Royal Thai Government and international officials, some future needs were put forward. The identified technical assistance needs include the areas of land survey, GIS and remote sensing; soil and underground water quality assessment; and environmental monitoring, modeling, and restoration. Technical assistance for the development of effective warning systems is also on the list of needs, as well as the set-up of long-term monitoring of the ecosystem and rehabilitation of ocean resources. Immediate key activities to be implemented are assessments of threats and impacts on marine and coastal resources as well as implementing medium and long-term mitigation and rehabilitation plans, in particular with regard to coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and protected areas. The Department of Disaster Mitigation and Prevention (DDMP) has identified the need for technical assistance and funding to support capacity development and training in the full range of disaster management techniques including Search and Rescue.

V. CHANNELS FOR DELIVERY OF INTERNATIONAL AID

The contact point within the RTG for offering pledges of international assistance is the Humanitarian Relief Coordinator, Mr. Nopadol Gunavibool, Director-General, Department of East Asian Affairs. He can be reached at +66-2-6435191.

UNDP/UNOPS has established a "Rapid Relief and Recovery" (RRR) Fund to provide flexible, rapid and responsive support to the Thai authorities in procuring urgently needed goods and services for the

Tsunami relief and recovery efforts in Southern Thailand. The RRR Fund has already been used to procure 4 large generators for hospitals, as well as equipment to support forensic operations and coastal reef restoration efforts.

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