

# TSUNAMI UN DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

## **Children are among most severely affected victims:**

As millions of people in coastal communities around the rim of the Indian Ocean struggle to survive the aftermath of the disaster, the United Nations is coordinating one of the world's largest ever relief operations. Several UN Agencies are working with NGOs and others in the region to respond to the most critical needs: food, shelter, medicine and special aid for children.

According to UNICEF, children account for a large proportion of casualties because they represent 39 per cent of the overall population in the eight hardest-hit countries. Eyewitness accounts indicate that many children died because they weren't strong enough to hold on to fixtures or trees when huge tidal waves swept them off their feet. "Kids can run but they were least able to withstand the flooding or hold on; the ones that survived sustained injuries and severe trauma," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy.

There are also those like Tamarashi, a 13-year-old girl from a coastal village in India, who watched from her family's kitchen as her parents, who were sitting under a coconut palm trying to sell fish, were folded into the waves. It would be three days after the waters receded before relief workers could coax Tamarashi to leave the beach. She survived the waves after getting caught on a coconut tree and is now too stunned to do little more than cry and ask why she wasn't taken along with her parents.

"It is hard to imagine the fear, confusion and desperation of children who have seen enormous waves wash away their worlds and cast dead bodies upon the shore," said Bellamy. "Children have lost all semblance of the life they knew...they are in desperate need of care."

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## **Reuniting children with extended family is first priority:**

UNICEF has estimated that children account for more than one-third of tsunami deaths. UNICEF is also concerned that children throughout the tsunami-devastated region have been orphaned or separated from their families and are in critical need of basic care and support.

UNICEF is starting to coordinate with NGOs and government authorities to develop systems to identify children and reunite them with parents or other relatives. In addition, UNICEF is:

- > delivering relief supplies like water purification materials and clothing, blankets and medicines to affected areas throughout the region;
- > working with government and religious organizations to establish 30 child / community activity centers in camps for displaced people in Indonesia's worst-hit areas of Aceh and North Sumatra provinces;
- > sending teams of specially-trained pediatricians and nurses to Thailand to provide psychological care and support to help children overcome by trauma, to complement a network of trained child rights volunteers UNICEF has on the ground who are already identifying children in need.
- > launching major sanitation and clean-up drives in camps for displaced people in India to ensure proper use of chlorine tablets to safe-guard water, and oral re-hydration salts to prevent diarrhoea, particularly deadly for children suffering from dehydration or malnutrition.

To assist this effort, you can donate online at: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

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## **Delivering emergency food aid:**

The UN's World Food Programme is playing a critical role in alleviating the suffering of the millions of hungry victims of the Asian Tsunami. WFP – the world's largest humanitarian agency – estimates it will provide emergency rations to two million people over the next six months. It will also play a central role in coordinating the complex logistics of transporting relief supplies and personnel to the affected areas both in Africa and in Asia, as well as the vast region of scattered islands in between.

From the beginning of the crisis, WFP was able to respond immediately, drawing on food-stocks from aid operations already underway in many of the affected countries. It also diverted ships carrying WFP food supplies and launched airlift operations to the Indonesian province of Aceh, as well as to the Maldives. In Sri Lanka, WFP already had enough food to feed 500,000 people for 15 days, and additional food supplies were on the way in order to reach the nearly 750,000 people estimated to need assistance.

In order to sustain its speedy response, WFP will require strong financial support from governments, corporations and individuals. Millions of people whose lives have been destroyed depend on your generosity.

Please contribute to:

The World Food Programme  
2 UN Plaza, DC2-2500, NY, NY 10017  
Tel: 212-963-4619

You can also donate online at:

**[www.friendsofwfp.org](http://www.friendsofwfp.org)**

For more information, visit:

**[www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)**

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## **Providing emergency shelters:**

UNHCR, as part of the United Nations Relief effort, is providing emergency shelters to 100,000 people in Indonesia's Aceh province who lost their homes in the devastating earthquake and tidal waves. Aceh, located on the northern tip of Indonesia's Sumatra island, was closest to the epicentre of the earthquake.

“Much of Aceh has been levelled and the local population urgently needs shelter and basic living supplies,” said the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers. UNHCR is currently airlifting over 3,500 lightweight tents, 20,000 kitchen sets, plastic sheeting for 20,000 families and 100,000 blankets.

In Sri Lanka, UNHCR is using its seven offices and 95 staff across the country to continue delivery of emergency relief supplies of plastic sheeting, plastic mats, cooking sets and clothing to the needy population in the war-affected areas and in the south. Supplies are being delivered to Colombo, Hambantota, Mallativu, Trincomalee and Jaffna.

On the other side of the Indian Ocean, UNHCR is part of a UN Country Team from Kenya that is involved in emergency relief in Somalia, where hundreds of villages are said to have been destroyed.

To donate to the UN's refugee agency, visit: [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)

For updates on the UN humanitarian relief effort: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)