



SOUTH/SOUTHEAST ASIA & EAST AFRICA: EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMIS

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Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers – making the difference in tsunami-affected countries

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the largest volunteer-based organization in the world. In more than 180 countries, almost 100 million people give their time to assist vulnerable members of their communities. It is the principle of volunteerism within the Red Cross and Red Crescent that distinguishes it from other humanitarian organizations around the world.

On 26 December 2004 it was Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers who provided immediate assistance in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami which would become one of the worst natural disasters in recorded history. Many of these volunteers in tsunami-affected countries helped distribute relief items, provided first aid and contributed significantly to the collection and identification of human remains throughout the early days after the tsunami. These tireless efforts continued for months despite the grief many had themselves suffered from having lost either loved ones, or friends, or all of their personal belongings. All told some 30,000 Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff have responded to this natural disaster. These volunteers are at the very heart of the Movement.

One year on, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers continue to be engaged in a broad spectrum of humanitarian assistance activities. Their neutrality and impartiality is widely recognized in tsunami-affected countries due to their long-standing community involvement and visibility. These activities include:



Almost 100 million volunteers around the world assist vulnerable members of their communities by giving time to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers provide humanitarian assistance across a wide range of programme areas in tsunami-affected countries.

- Relief – the traditional Red Cross and Red Crescent role of distributing food and relief items, and registering beneficiaries;
- Reconstruction – clearing debris, assisting with information gathering to determine housing requirements and monitoring beneficiary lists with local authorities;
- First aid – assistance in the transport of wounded and treatment of casualties;
- Immunization campaigns – pre-campaign social mobilization and door-to-door monitoring to ensure that all those eligible have been inoculated;
- Maintenance of transitional and temporary shelters – assisting the technical specialists in assessing maintenance needs such as adequate water supplies, drainage and flood protection;

- Water and sanitation – operation of water purification plants and transport of water supplies;
- Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) – delivering hygiene and water and sanitation awareness in tent and barrack temporary living centres;
- Coastal rehabilitation – social mobilization for mangrove plantation projects along the tsunami-ravaged coastlines;
- Psycho-social support – engagement in community visits and counselling activities.

Every volunteer has a story to tell

The difficulties faced by volunteers in responding to an emergency of this size are not easy to imagine. Each and every volunteer who responded has a story to tell of that terrible day and the difficult times that followed. In understanding what volunteers did we can garner a greater understanding of the importance of volunteers to the Red Cross and Red Crescent's disaster response work.

Ardian Siregar, 30, is an Indonesian Red Cross volunteer whose job was to collect human remains – he is among those workers who recovered well over 100,000 bodies following the tsunami. Ardian, a team leader, did nothing else every day for three months – an extremely difficult yet necessary task. Now he is a trainer, helping to organize a Red Cross ambulance service in Banda Aceh. A Red Cross colleague suggested to him that after collecting so many bodies week after week, his present work which will prevent death must be so rewarding. Ardian replied that there was no difference, both jobs are about having respect for people and doing what you can for them.



Indonesian Red Cross volunteer, Ardian Siregar, who spent three months collecting human remains from tsunami-affected areas, now helps to train others who will operate a new ambulance service in Banda Aceh.

Mr. S. Subatheepan sees the positive effect his work as a Sri Lanka Red Cross Society psycho-social support volunteer is having on tsunami-affected people as they cope with and overcome the psychological effects of the tsunami. In turn, it is helping him in his own efforts to deal with the loss of his mother in the disaster, swept away in the waves that tore through his village in the eastern coastal area of Sri Lanka. Mr Subatheepan understands how people feel, given how sad he felt after losing his mother in the tsunami and uses that knowledge to find the best way to help them. He says that children are going back to school and adults are going back to work. People tell him that the Red Cross has made a difference in their lives.



Sri Lanka Red Cross volunteers and International Federation workers offer psychological support to families who survived.

Lenawati, a 23-year-old student and Red Cross volunteer, was at sea with Red Cross colleagues when the tsunami came, travelling from Pulo Aceh island to Banda

Aceh. The sea began to swell and their boat was sent spinning. Somewhere in the distance Lenawati heard what she thought was an explosion. Unable to get to Banda, the boat returned to the island where they found total devastation. Corpses lay everywhere. When she finally did reach Banda Aceh in search of help for the island, she saw the scale of the disaster. A nightmare had begun that extended to her west coast village where her grandparents were among the victims. Still mourning her own loss, she joined the relief effort. Today she helps the Red Cross restore homes and livelihoods in Aceh.

These stories are just a few examples of the work that thousands of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers undertook, meeting immediate needs and allowing for the delivery of one of the largest humanitarian relief and recovery operations ever.

A new national society for the Maldives

The Maldives was one of the countries hardest hit by the tsunami – only nine of its 199 inhabited islands escaped flooding, 13 islands had to be totally evacuated and a third of the country's population was severely affected. It is the only tsunami-affected country which has no Red Cross or Red Crescent national society. Early in the operation it was determined together with the Government of the Maldives that the formation of a national society in the country should be a priority for the benefit of not only tsunami-affected communities but the Maldives as a whole for the coming decades.

This month will mark another milestone in the development of the Maldives Red Crescent Society in that Red Cross and Red Crescent delegates will make nationwide island visits to each of 20 atolls in the Maldives teaching about the history and mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and recruiting volunteers for the new national society.

Latest operational developments

Indonesia

- 321 shelter frames have been constructed to date in 22 villages, with 147 transitional homes completed with wooden walls and flooring. A further 280 sites have been identified as the programme continues. The current rainy season has slowed the outreach to some areas more difficult to reach, however additional implementing partners have been identified for the Meulaboh region, on Simeuleu Island, and for a broader area on Nias Island.
- The cumulative total number of beneficiaries for distribution of food and relief items in Aceh and Nias stands at 627,524, a number that has increased in recent weeks. A major delivery of hygiene parcels has been added to the distributions, with 42,500 hygiene kits moving through the pipeline per week since mid-November, for a total of 168,000 kits delivered during the past 30 days.
- The replacement programme for worn tents is ongoing, with 20,336 of the new waterproof, rounded-top versions delivered and now in use.
- The Federation's water and sanitation team has set up two mobile water treatment plants provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to supply a secure source of safe water for tent and barrack camps and nearby villages in the region of Aceh Besar district bordering Banda Aceh, to fill the gap until the local water utility can resume normal operations. The Federation's system is already producing 210,000 litres of water per day that is being delivered by water tankers and in 5,000-litre truck-mounted bladders to storage reservoirs that pump the water to a network of tap stands.
- The water and sanitation team has in the last 30 days begun a household latrine construction project in Ganda Pura and Janka sub-districts of Bireuen on the eastern coast of Aceh province. Also, with the 67 transitional shelter units completed in Olora village on the outskirts of the port capital of Gunung Sitoli on Nias Island, four blocks of latrines have been constructed, each block consisting of four latrines, two bathing stations and a septic tank. Two similar latrine blocks are underway at Pramuka village on Nias, site of the second transitional shelter community on the earthquake-damaged island.

- The Indonesian Red Cross ([Palang Merah Indonesia/PMI](#)), working in close collaboration with the Federation's disaster management team, played a lead role in the country's first early warning system simulated activation on 26 December in the city of Padang on central Sumatra's west coast, as part of the one-year tsunami commemoration. While the entire municipal population of one million were 'virtually' evacuated, PMI's response actions were real, with deployment of ambulances and first aid volunteers, and the setting up of shelters and feeding stations. PMI volunteers were deployed into the streets with megaphones to support public order and to instruct the public on safe movement. The Red Cross team helped to design the disaster simulation scenario which was broadcast on national television.
- The current rainy season has increased instances of malaria and dengue fever in Aceh and Nias. Threat of Avian influenza has also surfaced with the H5N1 virus having been detected in poultry. Federation and PMI health specialists are collaborating with local authorities and other agencies in the preparation of an outbreak control and response plan, and PMI volunteers are participating in a malaria, dengue and Avian flu awareness programme.

Sri Lanka

- The construction of three temporary nursing schools has been completed. Each structure will accommodate 250 students in support of the Government of Sri Lanka drive to train an additional 15,000 nurses by 2015. The schools will eventually be replaced by permanent structures.
- The construction process for three major and nine smaller hospitals is underway, part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent commitment to rehabilitate, reconstruct and upgrade over 60 health facilities across Sri Lanka.
- Construction-related vocational training projects have started in three tsunami-affected districts in the south of Sri Lanka. The projects develop the employment and earning potential of selected members of the local community, at the same time as contributing toward the overall post-tsunami reconstruction effort across the island. All training course participants receive a certificate of achievement and a tool kit.
- Red Cross and Red Crescent water sanitation experts are working to improve and upgrade water and sanitation facilities in transitional shelters housing tsunami-affected families. Improvements include upgrading of camp drainage and latrines. The Federation's team has finished work on three transitional shelters, and a further five sites have been identified. In addition, Australian, Hong Kong branch of the Red Cross Society of China, French, Spanish and German Red Cross societies are working to improve water sanitation facilities in transitional shelters in a total of six districts.
- In the meantime, water purification units in the area continue to produce and distribute up to 3 million litres of drinking water every week.
- The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continues to respond to natural and man-made disasters across the island. Most recently, relief assistance was provided to 147 fire-affected families in Colombo. Pre-positioned relief stocks used to assist 28,000 families affected by floods in November and December 2005 have been replenished.
- A total of 56 sites have been identified for construction of 6,479 houses by the Federation. These sites are located throughout 10 tsunami-affected areas, although the majority will be constructed in the north and eastern districts of Ampara and Trincomalee. An additional 1,050 houses are being built by other Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies on seven sites.
- On 23 December 2005 a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka, the [Sri Lanka Red Cross Society \(SLRCS\)](#), the International Federation and the World Bank - International Development Association (IDA). The memorandum marks the beginning of a collaboration under which the Red Cross will commit USD 25 million towards the owner-driven construction of a further 10,000 permanent houses.

Maldives

- As of the beginning of January, 11,214 rain water harvesting kits had been delivered to the island authorities on 66 islands in 14 atolls. It is estimated that deliveries will continue until the end of February or early March.
- An agreement worth CHF 2.9 million was signed for the construction of a reverse osmosis (desalinization) system on 19 islands between the Federation and Aqua-Tech, Singapore.
- Sewer project surveys on four islands were completed including topographical, environmental, socio-economic elements. The concept design was completed and approved, and the detailed design phase has commenced.
- Dhuvafaaru Island development project – the water supply and the renewable energy have been combined into one project for one consultant to coordinate. The Federation is joining Canadian Red Cross to further an integrated approach for the wind power project. The Dhuvafaaru ‘green’ island is shaping up to be a unique example of environmentally friendly development within the Maldives tsunami recovery programmes.
- Dhuvafaaru Island housing continues to proceed through the tendering phase and finalization for building 600 houses. The Government of the Maldives has completed the road clearing and blocking for streets.

Somalia

- The Federation and Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), with assistance from the Nairobi regional delegation’s water and sanitation unit, conducted a participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation (PHAST) training for 35 SRCS health officers and volunteers drawn from three branches of Puntland. The participants were trained on how to prevent diarrhoeal diseases through hygiene promotion and addressing community management of water and sanitation facilities. The trainees are expected to conduct similar training at the branch level and thereafter community levels. Training on how to conduct a baseline survey and questionnaire pre-testing was also included. Participants will carry out baseline surveys in their respective locations. The trained volunteers in PHAST will also play a key role in leading the processes through their planned community training, aimed at raising knowledge and awareness levels to assist communities to use the facilities well for maximum health benefits.

For more details and news stories, photos and all operational updates related to the tsunami visit:
<http://www.ifrc.org/tsunami>