

Pax Christi International
Lessons from the tsunami:
Sustainable peace is a prerequisite for any recovery

It is one of Pax Christi's basic assumptions that there is no lasting development without sustainable peace. War exacerbates poverty, peacemaking can lead to development. Consequently, peacebuilding is part of the challenge of recovery, especially in conflict areas, and our solidarity with victims should always include peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Peacebuilding cannot be sustained without people's or tsunami victims' participation in development projects after relief and rehabilitation process. People should be able to participate in decision-making, monitoring and evaluation as well. Without this process the conflict will continue.

The 26 December 2004 tsunami caused widespread death and devastation in South East Asia and East Africa. It is not accidental that in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the two countries worst hit by the disaster, relief workers confronted a combustible mix of neglect, lack of basic needs and mistrust, which led to delays in getting the relief assistance to the people in need. Both countries have been racked by long-running internal conflicts.

First lesson. The forgotten conflicts, in for instance Aceh, Indonesia and in the northeast of Sri Lanka were not wiped away by the murderous tidal wave. These conflicts thwart aid operations and adversely affect the ability of governments to effectively communicate emergency evacuation messages. Quickly the international community bringing aid to these regions realised that conflict resolution and peacebuilding is at the core of any effort for reconstruction and that long term sustainable development rooted in a more just global economy is at the core of peacebuilding.

Another lesson. The tidal wave in Asia generated an unprecedented and worldwide 'tsunami' of solidarity in public opinion, followed by pledges of governments and international institutions. Politicians, in particular from the EU, claimed publicly that reconstruction should be part of a long-term action plan including a sustainable solution for the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Aceh. Never before was this essential message – meeting the mission of Pax Christi – articulated so loudly: don't forget sustainable peace, people centred development, ecological integrity, human rights, reconciliation, etc. Reconstruction should not just restore the poverty situation from before. A "reconstruction plus" programme should include conflict resolution, community building, poverty eradication, environmental restoration, etc.

Thirdly, the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 claimed 3000 lives. The tsunami on December 26, 2004 claimed 230,000 lives and left millions homeless. Some claim that the world changed after 9/11 – in many ways the immediate U.S. pursuit of national security by "any means possible," primarily military action, forced that change. The post-tsunami world should be changed as well, but in the opposite direction. Toward that end, Pax Christi and its supporters will continue working for a *new, worldwide movement* of inclusive solidarity for justice, peace and sustainable development in the tsunami-affected countries of South Asia.

We are painfully aware that the destruction wrought by war in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere parallels the destruction wrought by the tsunamis. We call for an immediate shift

from expending massive resources on war making and destruction to rebuilding the communities that have been devastated – both by the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and by the tsunamis of war and armed conflict.

Finally, this terrible disaster reminds us also that we must carry on the fight to reduce the state of extreme poverty that leads those who suffer it to live in conditions such that they will always be the first victims of Earth's convulsions and natural disasters.

Pax Christi International has partners and member organisations in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, India and Bangladesh. For example: in January 2005, Alfons Schabarum from Pax Christi Germany started a 3-year civil peace work programme in Sri Lanka. Alfons will work together with the Congregation of the Oblates in Jaffna, the north of Sri Lanka. They will reconstruct a peace centre which was destroyed by the Tsunami disaster. Such a peace centre is needed because of the civil war on the island.

We ask the international community:

Ensure that aid reaches those who most need it. To support all efforts aiming at improving the strategic and operational links across the short-term crisis management actions and longer-term peace building and reconstruction efforts. Gaps should be filled by providing a more integrated mechanism for planning, training, recruitment and deployment of civilians, incorporating relevant expertise from non-state experts into the growing peace building and crisis management toolbox of institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union.

We will remain attentive to the process of relief and rebuilding lives and communities to ensure that the basic human rights of the most vulnerable people are respected in every situation; that people, especially the poor, have the opportunity to participate in decisions that shape the reconstruction; that investments in the region benefit local communities rather than foreign corporations; and that every effort be made to ensure that the integrity of creation is respected or restored in the reconstruction process.

Above all, the fight against the extreme poverty that affects almost one quarter of the world's population and the effects of which in terms of human suffering are not always fully measured, should be untiringly pursued.

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