

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

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## Salvaging Meulaboh's land registry documents

**Meulaboh, Banda Aceh, March 23rd** - UNDP has begun a project to rescue vital documents badly damaged by the tsunami which record land ownership in Meulaboh.

Until recently, it was assumed that all land ownership documentation in the area had been destroyed. But two weeks ago the papers of the Land Registry were discovered by local government officials, intact but soaked by floodwater.

The discovery is important for the reconstruction process. "People can't reclaim land without land documents, and most of them lost their personal documentation in the tsunami," said John Long, UNDP Project Advisor. "In that sense, these papers are critical."

Soon after the discovery of the documents UNDP funded a visit of an expert team from the National Archives in Jakarta. Their inspection revealed that the documents could survive but needed to be rescued immediately, as they had already started to rot. In consultation with Japanese experts, funded by JICA, who have been working on a similar restoration process in Banda Aceh it was decided to conduct initial restoration in Meulaboh. This is done under the supervision of experts from the National Archives.

In order to save the documents each will be dipped in ethanol to kill the bacteria and prevent further decay, undergo some basic cleaning and then be transported to Jakarta for full restoration.

UNDP brought two officials from Johna Pahlawan Sub-district to Banda Aceh for training in the necessary techniques by JICA and National Archives personnel. In addition UNDP is supplying tools and materials for restoration.

The documents will eventually be boxed up and transported to Jakarta, where they will be put through a freeze drying machine, which JICA are donating. After this, the documents will be electronically copied and put in a data base.

It is estimated that the process will take between four and five months to complete. "This will make a big difference to the lives of all those who had their land ownership registered by the documents." said John Long.

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Latest information on tsunami disaster efforts is available at: <http://www.undp.or.id/tsunami/index.asp>