

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme



Rebuilding an island in the Maldives: A roof over every head in Naalaafushi

20 April 2005: It is almost four months since the tsunami washed away almost every home and building on Naalaafushi, but today, every home on the island has been rebuilt and every family has a roof over their head.

As the community prepares for the monsoon season, people's lives are slowly getting back to normality. After camping in the ruins of a neighbouring house since the tsunami, Haleemath Ali and her family have just moved into their rebuilt home.

"When I saw what had happened, I wondered, how will I live?" she says. "How will I reside in this house anymore? What about my children? I didn't feel like leaving the island because this was my island and I've always been here. I'm just really happy that we are getting a new house. It's going to be a stronger house. It's going to be a new beginning," she says.

The homes on Naalaafushi were rebuilt through a partnership between Banyan Tree Resorts, which volunteered its services, time, man power and funding to work with the community of Naalaafushi and the United Nations Development Programme.

"This is not just about money," says Banyan Tree General Manager Francois Huet. "It's about people. People with values and principles committed to getting the job done. It could not have been achieved without this team work and strong public-private partnership."

For most people on the remote island, rebuilding a house can cost the equivalent of the income earned over ten years as almost all of the construction material need to be imported and carried by boat. But in Naalaafushi, UNDP provided the tools, materials and development expertise, and the Banyan Tree group dispatched carpenters, plumbers and other construction workers from their resort to assist the local residents in the reconstruction.

For weeks, boats would travel eight hours ferrying tons of building materials from the capital of Male to the island, which is in the southern atoll of Meemu. Dozens of men and women affected by the tsunami received "cash for work" and were provided some income and training to repair more than 70 houses in just over two months.

"We have lived and worked among these communities for many years," says Azeez Abdul Hakeen, director of Banyan Tree Conservation project and leader of the recovery team. "I see our role in recovery efforts as something much larger than simply handing out a check. We are directly involved in the assessment of damage, transportation of materials and construction. We've worked closely with UNDP to see these dream come true."

"This is a chance to make a difference where it counts and be able to show results," says UNDP Resident Representative Patrice Coeur-Bizot. "Through this joint venture, we were able to make the most effective use of all the resources available on the ground and quickly respond to the needs of the affected families."

—*By Christelle Chapoy*