

PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Development Programme

Maldives and UNDP in effort to rebuild critical infrastructure

Male, Maldives, 29 March 2005 -- An urgent plan to rebuild vital sea-transport and utility infrastructure that was destroyed in last December's tsunami was signed this morning by the Government of the Maldives in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The plan was signed hours after the country woke up from an early tsunami warning after a massive quake shook Indonesia.

The new public works, which will give the Maldives' economy a much needed shot in the arm, will also provide short term employment to the affected population while communities will be involved in the reconstruction efforts. Repairs to jetties, harbours and navigational aids are expected to improve access to schools and hospitals, and jetties and will help revitalise local businesses and restore normality in people's life by reconnecting the electricity system and replacing damaged electricity cables in some islands. The programme will take one year and will result in a removal of the bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the transport chain that have a direct impact on commodity prices and living standards.

"The challenge is now to regain the momentum and progress in the development of the Maldives that was taking place prior to the tsunami," said Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UNDP Resident Representative in the Maldives. "It is essential that we engage in a 'recovery plus' where local communities receive adequate equipment and training to build safer homes and public infrastructure and are fully engaged in the planning and reconstruction process."

The US\$5 million project, funded by Japan, the European Union, and the UN Foundation, will facilitate the efficient and timely distribution of relief and building material, and help restore the electrical distribution systems in tsunami affected areas.

"With a population spread over 200 islands, quick delivery of relief aid is a real challenge. Restoring and improving essential public infrastructures, such as hospitals, transportation and telecommunication systems become an urgent priority," said Hon. Mr. Ahmed Abdulla, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs.

One fourth of the islands suffered major damages to essential infrastructure, such as jetties and harbours, hampering access to affected communities. In some of the most devastated islands, schools, municipalities, sea walls and navigation infrastructures were completely destroyed. In 95 islands, the tsunami damaged the electric power

supply system, hindering over 20 powerhouses and 100 generators, and smashing up hundreds of streetlights and kilometres of cables.

The overall damage to the infrastructure sector amounts to US\$68 million. A steering committee including representatives from relevant Ministries, private sector companies, community based organisations, donors and UNDP, has been established last February to ensure proper planning, prioritisation and oversight of the reconstruction effort. Twenty seven priority sites have been selected for the immediate phase. Building material is being shipped to the Island of Muli to start ground work on the quay wall and the reconstruction of the regional hospital.

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