

# Maldives Situation Report

## #04/2004

*Effects of Tsunami on 26 December 2004*

**Date: 30 December 2004 (4 days after disaster)**

**Prepared by UN Country Team, Male', Maldives**

### **I. SITUATION**

#### **1. Nature of the Disaster**

High waves from the Asian tsunami hit the coastline of the Maldives islands at approximately 0430 GMT (local time 0930); three hours after tremours were felt from the 9.0 magnitude earthquake that occurred off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia on 26 December 2004.

#### **2. Area affected**

The entire country of 200 islands was affected by the tsunami. The worst affected areas were the central atolls that make up the Maldives.

#### **3. Impact**

Mass flooding and disruption of normal life on a national scale leading to loss of lives, injury to thousands and devastation to property and other essential life lines like food, water, sanitation, shelter and communication. Livelihoods have been lost or severely compromised due to damage to boats and harbours, and the impact of the disaster on the tourist industry.

##### **3.1 Damage by sector:**

Information on damage and needs is available from 80 per cent of inhabited islands, collected through government surveys, telephone discussions with inhabitants, and live assessments. According to Government figures, 4,000 buildings have been damaged. On 13 per cent (25) of these islands, there is near total destruction of all buildings.

Regarding transportation infrastructure, the international airport continues to function normally during the day allowing only take offs during the evening. Of the four regional airport runways, two have sustained some damage. Inter-atoll and inter-island transport is only possible by boats or small seaplanes. Fifteen per cent (30) of islands suffered damage to jetties and harbours. See more on the transportation sector below under "constraints."

The telecommunications network has now been restored to all atolls and electricity has been restored to almost all currently inhabited islands. Gas and supply of fuel continue to be a problem especially in the most severely affected islands due to transportation difficulties.

Health posts on 10 per cent of islands (8) have been completely destroyed or washed away with just one health post among these having minor damage (structure usable).

Although a limited supply of basic staple foods (rice, flour and sugar) has been delivered to most islands, food security remains a concern. In particular, the government has requested food for children and babies.

Two members of the UNDAC team, with WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and the Government Technical Task Force conducted an assessment of Guraidhoo Island on 29 December, and continued to assess islands on 30 December (results to be reported in 31 December sit rep). The general observation on this particular island was that the physical damage could, with appropriate assistance, be cleaned up and restored in the near term.

The team confirmed initial reports about the gravity of the overall situation in the Maldives. The following observations from Guraidhoo island give an indication of conditions on some affected islands, but does not represent the worst affected islands.

**Displacement:** Two-thirds of the population of Guraidhoo (about 1,000 people) evacuated to Male, while some 25 residents remained in the National Mental Health Institute, one of the few undamaged buildings.

**Water and sanitation:** An estimated 30-40 per cent of rainwater harvesting equipment has been damaged and groundwater wells have been contaminated by sea water. While bottled water has been delivered to the island, solutions will be needed quickly to ensure a more regular water supply for drinking, cooking and

bathing. Chlorine is normally used for water purification, and since the disaster, chlorine has been extensively used for disinfection, depleting supplies.

**Health and hygiene:** The tsunami scattered household fish and household waste from the main dumpsite across the entire island, leaving a layer of debris of cans, plastic, glass, organic matter, rotting fish carcasses. Clean-up will be a major challenge owing to the lack of heavy equipment on the islands, and the difficulty of bringing such equipment by boat as, in most cases, island access is designed for small boats (see below under “secondary threats”). The waste poses a serious health risk and could make it difficult for people to return to the island. The health centre was extensively damaged and basic medications are needed.

**Shelter and infrastructure:** An estimated 30 per cent of houses are destroyed beyond repair. The remaining houses are inhabitable but many need repairs. The jetty is intact and can be used for emergency deliveries by boat. Electricity and mobile phone communications have been restored

**Nutrition:** Food and water had been delivered to the islands but the handouts are not, as yet, based on specific needs. Foodstuffs for infants were not available.

On 30 December, the UNDAC team visited a school in Male which is hosting 460 people (mainly women and children) evacuated from some of the worse affected islands.

According to officials and volunteers at the centre there is currently adequate food, health, and shelter supplies. Recreational activities for children and counselling are being provided, through local volunteers. All of the equipment, food and non-food items at the centre was donated by local people and businesses, and the daily running of the centre is through volunteers. While assistance is stable for the time being, officials and volunteers warned that this could change quickly depending on the length of the crisis and would welcome international support.

### 3.2 Effects on population:

The number of dead now 75 and the number of missing 42. Some 11,000 people have been displaced and registered by the authorities, although it is believed that thousands more have sought shelter with family and friends and are unable to live in their own accommodation. Two-thirds of the population (some 200,000 people) were directly affected by the disaster, and some 100,000 people—or one third of the population—were severely affected (e.g. rendered homeless, lost most or all of their possessions, forced to evacuate their islands, remain displaced, have no access to food, water and sanitation) and will be the focus of UN response. Specific information on reproductive health is currently not widely available. The authorities have compiled a list of the number of pregnant women per island.

### 4. Projected Evolution/Secondary Threats

Concern is increasing that the plight of the Maldives is being understated in the international media. It should be noted that the **entire country was affected** by the tsunami, and **one-third of the entire population** (some 100,000 people) requires immediate assistance, having in many cases lost their homes and possessions and their livelihoods. The Maldives also faces particular challenges to the provision of assistance, namely:

- ?? Population dispersion over 200 islands scattered over 900 kms. which means that even small quantities of aid have to be transported to every island by either boat, seaplane or helicopter.
- ?? On most islands, access is designed for small boats, thereby restricting the amounts of supplies and equipment that can be delivered at any one time.
- ?? Inclement weather (as in the past two days) restricts travel by boat and plane and hampers delivery of aid.
- ?? As a result of the above the country and its people remain vulnerable to continuing effects of the disaster.

## II. NATIONAL RESPONSE

### 5. Organization

(Remains the same).

### 6. Administrative measures

The status of national crisis and national emergency declared by the President remains in effect. The Association of business industry and the State Trading Organization has called on business and people not to hoard food or increase prices.

Clearance formalities for in-kind contributions are handled under the auspices of the Government Crisis Taskforce. All costs related to customs and clearance have been waived by the Government

### 7. Operations/Mobilization of resources

See below

### 8. Constraints

As noted above (secondary threats), the challenges of delivering aid to some 200 islands are formidable. In the medium term, these challenges will also impact on recovery and reconstruction efforts as ALL construction equipment and materials will have to be delivered to each island. Donors can expect that the forthcoming Flash Appeal will include a significant request in the transportation and logistics sector.

### **III. COUNTRY-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE**

#### **9. Resources mobilized/contributed locally**

The Task Force's Aid Coordination Unit has recorded a number of cash contributions from Maldivians and the local private sector totalling some US\$750,000. Maldivians have also contributed in-kind through the donation of food, bottled water, non-food items, as well as boats and sea planes for transportation.

#### **10. Coordination**

The UNDAC team, with UNDP, WHO, UNICEF and the Government Technical Task Force are conducting field assessment of some islands and public buildings in which IDPs are residing.

The UN agencies have appointed focal points to draft the Flash Appeal and work is underway to produce a first draft by 1 January.

### **IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

#### **12. Government requests**

The Government's Crisis Task Force relocated to a larger facility and the UNDAC team has unimpeded access to all of the relevant ministers. On 29 December, the Task Force issued a revised list of priority emergency items. Efforts are underway to urgently clarify with the Government the quantities needed of these items.

#### **13. Priority needs**

They remain:

- Water and sanitation
- Medical supplies
- Food items
- Logistics and coordination (in-country transport, storage and handling of relief supplies)
- Communications
- Shelter, blankets, clothing, household utensils
- Repairs to infrastructure
- Restoration of critical facilities, coordination
- Tents

#### **14. Assistance/items which are not needed:**

The UNDAC team is working closely with the Government's Crisis Task Force to clarify this information and put in place a system for tracking aid requirements, aid supply, and to identify aid items that are not a priority.

### **V. CHANNELS FOR DELIVERY OF INTERNATIONAL AID**

#### **15. Cash contributions**

The Government has set up bank accounts for cash donations:

Ministry of Finance and Treasury Disaster Relief Fund

Bank of Maldives

Account No (Foreign currency): 7701- 147 900- 002

Account No (Local currency): 7701- 147 900- 001

Bank swift code: MALBMVMV

#### **16. In-kind contributions**

Accessibility to disaster zones are undertaken from the main International Airport. There are four regional airports (North, South-East, South-West and South) which can accommodate smaller airplanes. The International Airport is central and is located next to the island of Male. Seaplanes also function although a number of seaplanes were badly damaged in the disaster. Boats and naval ships continue to form part of the distribution chain although slower than compared with other means.

### **VI. INTERNATIONAL PLEDGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of External Resources is recording cash and in-kind contributions from the international community. According to these records, as of 0900 hours on 30 December, contributions have been pledged and/or made by Bhutan, China, Greece, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Libya, Turkey, and the USA. Contributions are valued at some \$1.7 million.

The UNDP/ OCHA consigned water containers requested by the Government is assured and is to arrive at the airport tonight. The DFID/ UNICEF consignment of 17,280 litres of water arrived this morning. Emergency medical kits ordered by the Government through WHO are to arrive tonight.

**VII. OTHER INFORMATION**

17. Field office contact

Aishath Jeelaan, Communications Officer, United Nations Resident Coordinator System, Tel: (960) 324501 ext. 227, mob: (960) 787 987.

18. Expected date of next report

31 December 2004.