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Agence France Presse -- English January 23, 2005 Sunday

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January 23, 2005 Sunday 2:26 AM GMT

LENGTH: 2563 words

HEADLINE: The most powerful and poignant quotes on the Asian tsunami horror

DATELINE: BANDA ACEH, Indonesia Jan 23

BODY:

The following is a selection of the most powerful, poignant and touching quotes of the past four weeks about the events of December 26 and their aftermath around the world.

The disaster has affected millions, from those who have lost their loved ones, to those involved in the relief operation or who have been moved to donate millions of dollars, euros and yen in response.

-- THE SHOCK OF THE EVENT --

"The sea is coming inland" -- panicked scream heard by Sri Lankan resident Waruna Premachandra as the tidal waves hit.

"The children are still in shock. We looked death in the face" -- Italian grandmother Maria Boscani after landing in Rome from the main tourist hub in southern Thailand, Phuket.

"Without my wife I don't want to live. But because of my child, I will" -- Sri Lankan Pala Withanage.

"I must admit I have never seen such utter destruction -- mile after mile and you wonder where are the people, what happened to them?" -- UN Secretary General Kofi Annan after flying over the Sumatra coast.

"I had a chance to witness the destruction first hand and only by seeing it on the ground can you really appreciate what it must have been like on that terrible day" -- US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Sri Lanka.

"I can still remember her smile she gave me before she disappeared under the water. Please Allah, let me find my mother" -- 18-year-old Suryard, Meulaboh, Sumatra.

"It's of such an unprecedented scale and it hit not just one country but so many" -- Amy

Barry, a spokeswoman for the British charity Oxfam.

"Our initial studies carried out in Port Blair region show the land mass has shifted 1.2 metres (yards) towards the southeastern side but we're still waiting for the final reports" -- Indian surveyor-general, Prithvish Nag.

"We are like persons who do not exist. We have been hit hard by the disaster, lost everything and are famished" -- Achenese fisherman Busriadi.

"This is a different Sweden that we now have to work in" -- Swedish parliament speaker Bjoern von Sydow on opening the session where a minute's silence was observed.

-- THE CELEBRITIES AND THE HOLIDAY-MAKERS --

"People were screaming and kids were screaming all over the place, screaming 'help, help'. And after a few minutes you didn't hear the kids any more" -- Czech supermodel Petra Nemcova who clung to a palm tree for eight hours in the devastated Thai resort of Khao Lak.

"The New Year, I don't know when that is, I don't want to talk about it" -- Frenchman Nicolas Debray, 28, lost his five-month old son, who was drowned, and his 80-year-old grandmother, who died in his mother's arms.

"My visit to Thailand is born out of love, born out of passion, and out of the need to do something" -- singer Ricky Martin after meeting Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

-- THE PEOPLE THANKFUL FOR THE HELP THEY RECEIVED --

"Despite their own losses, they took care of us" -- Dutchwoman Irene Nicastro, who was forced to flee empty-handed as her hotel room in Galle in southern Sri Lanka filled with water.

"We are still alive. I'm happy I finally met someone from outside. Please let people know that we are still alive because people think the whole of Meulaboh has been destroyed and no one survived" -- Army sergeant Lazuardi on the northwest coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island.

-- THE LUCKY ESCAPES --

"I was yelling at them to run, but they couldn't hear me" -- 37-year-old Karin Svaerd, the Swedish woman pictured in an AFP exclusive photograph which showed her running into the waves to warn her children. All the family survived.

"In all my years as a sailor, this was my most awful experience" -- 56-year-old ship's captain M.S.L. Fernandes after sailing through the wall of water to safety from the Andaman Islands.

"Strangely I felt no fear... Thank God, with the power I had left, I managed to go to higher ground and the water was only a meter high" -- 26-year-old Indonesian clothes-seller Riza explaining how she and her neighbour's twins swam to safety, following a giant snake to guide her through the flood waters.

"It became clear to our Indonesian driver and helper that he had seen his mother and father swept away, did not know if they were alive or not, and had been wandering ever since" -- Sky News reporter Ian Dovaston said of young Indonesian survivor Martunis.

"It is an incredible story. To find a child who survived so many days without eating, on top of it all wearing Portugal's jersey, is almost a miracle" -- Real Madrid's Portuguese star Luis Figo.

-- THE RESPONSE OF WORLD LEADERS --

"This is an unprecedented global catastrophe and it requires an unprecedented global

response" -- UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

"At first it seemed a terrible disaster, a terrible tragedy. But I think as the days have gone on, people have recognised it as a global catastrophe" -- British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in his first public response to the natural disaster.

"On this first day of a new year, we join the world in feeling enormous sadness over a great human tragedy... The carnage is of a scale that defies comprehension" -- US President George W. Bush in his weekly radio address after ordering the nation's flag to be flown at half-mast in a sign of respect.

"This is a crisis of massive proportion, requiring a massive response from the international community" -- World Bank President James Wolfensohn.

"It is beyond me why are we so stingy, really. ... Even Christmas-time should remind many Western countries at least how rich we have become" -- Jan Egeland, the UN chief emergency relief coordinator, attacking rich countries like the United States for the amount of international aid they give. He later said he had been misinterpreted, but the United States increased its aid offer more than ten-fold, and donations from other nations snow-balled.

"Come with the money you pledge" -- Egeland added later, recalling past unfulfilled promises. "The people concerned will always remember the people who were supposed to help them... Those who made the pledges should also remember."

"There's a lot of talk about how some in the world don't appreciate America. Well, I can assure you that those who have been helped by our military appreciate America" -- President Bush.

"But in ... responding to the tsunami many in the Muslim world have seen a great compassion in the American people. Our troops are providing incredibly good service" -- president Bush.

-- THE PRIVATE DONORS --

Dozens of sports stars, film stars and other celebrities joined the international relief effort, donating money or time, or agreeing to play charity matches.

Seven-time world Formula One champion Michael Schumacher led the pack of sporting donors gifting a whopping 10 million dollars.

"The dawning of the New Year has not been as joyful for us this year because of the catastrophe in Asia... We sympathise with the victims in their grief" -- he said.

But even more than the wealthy stars, the disaster touched the hearts of the young and the ordinary people around the world.

"I hope it will do some good," said 13-year-old Tom Young from Bristol in southwest England. "It was awful watching what the people are going through."

And even those society condemns were moved. In northern France, inmates at Longuenesse prison have so far raised 540 dollars to help people recover from the tsunami disaster.

"This is a collection of funds from the prisoners, initiated by the prisoners," said the jail's deputy director, announcing a gift to the disaster appeal.

"The situation here is bad. We want to help our brothers and sisters. We have a lot of money with us. We have already spent two million dollars" -- businessman, Abdullah Hamid, after appearing in Aceh with another Saudi with a suitcase stuffed with cash. "

"Every year three million people die of AIDS. That is one tsunami every three weeks. Every

year 11 million children die of hunger and poverty and preventable disease. That is one tsunami every five days. We don't want donor interests in fighting poverty in Africa for example to be washed away by the Asian tsunami" -- United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) regional head Joana Merlin-Scholtes.

"The donor response has never, ever been better or more generous or more immediate. It's the first time ever no one has starved and no one will have no medical services for lack of resources" -- UN relief chief Jan Egeland

-- ASIAN LEADERS' REACTIONS --

"In Thailand the final death toll is likely to top 7,000 to 8,000. We expect to find more corpses as everywhere we went we found bodies" -- Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, wishing Thais a happier 2005 after a year dogged by misfortune.

"Do your duties as well as possible, day and night. We have the obligation to save each and everyone" -- Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono addressing soldiers in Banda Aceh, the provincial capital regarded as the ground zero of the disaster.

"I request the people to remain calm and cooperate with relief teams ... This is the time that one billion people must face this tragedy as one nation" -- Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam appeals to the people for unity and calm.

"We have lost much, but gained in strength by the knowledge of solidarity shown by the world... The world has responded massively in our hour of tragedy" -- Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"When we speak of a 'community of caring societies' in our region, we should be referring to this sort of massive collaboration" -- Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at Jakarta ASEAN aid meeting.

"This unprecedented calamity in our region has taught us, in the most compelling terms, that there is an urgent need for an early warning system in the Indian Ocean region, similar to that which exists in the Pacific" -- Seychelles President James Michel.

-- THE RELIGIOUS RESPONSE --

"Faith teaches us that even during the most difficult and painful of tests, such as the calamities which hit Southeast Asia in the past days, God will never abandon us" -- Pope John Paul II.

"God makes his presence known in applying his commandment" to love your neighbour, the pontiff added, praising the millions of people worldwide who have responded by donating to relief organisations.

For many victims of the disaster, however, the event showed their God's wrath with His people.

"It was as if God had unleashed his anger on the people" -- Muslim victim Haji Ali, the day after tsunamis destroyed his hometown Bireuen in Indonesia's Aceh province.

Religious leaders of the most affected faiths disagreed.

"Allah has his own way" -- said K.H. Ma'aruf, chairman of the Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI), the highest authority on Islam in Indonesia, adding that as "humble humans, there is no way we can comprehend his infinite wisdom".

"People are saying this phenomenon is the annoyance of god, but it is not so" -- Hindu cleric

Madambakkam Sreenivasa Bhattacharyar, chief priest of the famous Tirupati Tirumala Temple in tsunami-scarred southern India's Tamil Nadu state. "It is a natural phenomenon which has manifested because of a multitude of human mistakes on sky, earth and water. Religious law says the natural forces change direction because of these mistakes."

For Buddhists, also, the disaster was a result of the way humans have treated the natural world.

"We have destroyed nature, being selfish and greedy and only aiming for more prosperity, but never realising that we and nature are one" -- Sulak Sivaraksa in Bangkok.

-- THE DEATH TOLL AND THE EFFORT NEEDED --

"The death toll will grow exponentially on the western coast of Sumatra" -- Egeland said. "We may be talking tens of thousands of further deaths in this area... Whole coastal lines have been washed away, with everything including the villages and the villagers".

"The consequences of this are not just short-term and immediate but long-term and will require a great deal of work by the international community for months, if not years, to come" -- Blair, looking to the challenge to come.

"We need to make small, damaged airstrips some of the busiest airports in the world" -- Egeland on some of the logistical problems facing the relief effort.

"We must look ahead to rehabilitation and putting communities back on their feet. It will be a long, long process, it will take years" -- John Sparrow, a Beijing-based expert from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"My life is in a mess now. Unless aid funds come to us directly and quickly, we may all have to bury ourselves together with the dead" -- Aceh survivor Anita.

"I appeal to my overseas brothers in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore, to give us some capital with low interest rates to jump start our lives. We have no one to turn to" -- Wong Chin Chin, 56, an ethnic Chinese goldsmith in Aceh.

-- AFTERMATH AND RECONSTRUCTION --

"Tourists coming in family groups won't be back for quite a while but the tourists who come for the bars, for the sex, yes. And from now, from March" -- Belgian Georges Hutsenbang, the owner of Phuket's Angel Bar.

"I see no good reason to give loans. They're poor, we're rich, they need the money and I don't see why we need to ask for it back over the next 10 or 20 years" -- David Roodman, a research fellow at the Center for Global Development in Washington.

"The losses from tsunami are huge ... worth almost three billion dollars and that is what is going to be the reconstruction cost" -- Lalith Weeratunga, secretary to Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse.

"I prefer contact with the dead to the living. The bodies, I do not see them as human beings, but rather things, objects" -- volunteer diving instructor Stanislas Petitdemange, in Takua Pa, Thailand

"As devastating as the disaster is to the people in affected areas, Asia's resilience to external shocks will play a role in minimizing the impact the disaster will have on the region's overall economic growth. This is a profoundly tragic event for the region and for the millions who are suffering. But the economies of the affected countries except Sri Lanka and the Maldives should emerge with minimal damage" -- ADB chief economist Ifzal Ali.

"Rumours that it is dangerous to eat fish that have been in proximity to or have fed on victims' bodies are criss-crossing southern Asia, and reports suggest that fish consumption is dropping off as a result. There is no evidence, epidemiological or of any other nature, of an increased risk of fish and seafood-borne illnesses in the affected regions" -- Food and Agriculture Organisation.

"We don't want to stay any longer than we are wanted, most certainly not longer than we are needed" -- US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz.

"The people of Afghanistan... are eager to provide support despite (Afghanistan's) own misery. It is a moment of pride for Afghanistan. It shows that we are part of the international community" -- former Afghan health minister Sohaila Seddiq.

-- OBSTACLES TO RECONSTRUCTION --

"There will always be people who will try to profit from catastrophes for their own personal enrichment. Happily, there are not many of them" -- Terje Kristiansen, a Norwegian police inspector tasked with investigating crimes linked to the tsunami.

-- FUTURE PREVENTION --

"If everything goes well, the initial warning system for the Indian Ocean should be put in place at least in its provisional form by June 2006 and the global warning system should be put in place... by June 2007" -- UNESCO chief Koichiro Matsuura.

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