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## Press Briefing

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### PRESS BRIEFING ON TSUNAMI DISASTER

Instead of “D-Day”, today was “T-Day” plus 10, Jan Egeland said upon opening his briefing to correspondents at United Nations Headquarters, announcing that the pledges now totalled between \$3 billion and \$4 billion, and progress in the relief effort was being made by the hour.

Reiterating that the world was coming together in a manner never before seen, he said, “We must not fail. This is the time to show, to live up to our mandate and be able to say in a year from now that we showed the world we could and we did what was hoped of us by the community of nations.”

He said he wished to convey a few messages on behalf of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. To the affected governments, he hailed their immense efforts to assist their people in some of the affected societies. It would go down in the history books as the most effective assistance and relief effort ever undertaken, locally, nationally, and internationally -- which included the use made of those offers and international compassion. He also asked the governments to ensure chains of command among the ministers, between the military and civilian components of the effort, and to create focal points.

In that regard, he commended Indonesia’s Vice-President, who yesterday had confirmed to the Secretary-General’s Special Coordinator that he would immediately set up a central operations centre for all ministers, he said. He had also been assured of the cooperation of both the civil and military aspects. He also called on the governments to keep access clear in all areas, not only now, but in the longer run, as well. In some areas where the tsunami had struck, access had been poor before the disaster and that hampered his ability to be in those places.

He said his message to the parties to conflict was to suspend their conflict and work together with the United Nations and its partners to help their own people. There was peace now in both Aceh and in ceasefires in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, as well as in the better part of Somalia. “We need that ceasefire, that peace, to hold, because if new conflict broke out, we could not help the people”, he stressed. The unprecedented show of compassion and solidarity, nationally and internationally, had been a confidence-building measure, which should be used now to bring lasting peace to all of those societies.

To the 50 or so donors that had pledged between \$3 billion and \$4 billion, counting the phenomenal pledges just issued by Germany and Australia, he said: “Thank you for your money; thank you for your relief supplies, helicopters, airplanes; thank you for being with us now; be with us in the long haul and, as donors, recognize and respect the international coordination as we undertake it now in the United Nations and in the Red Cross and Red Crescent family.”

Thank you, he said, too, to the agencies and non-governmental organizations and local organizations, for the assistance they had provided so far. Tens of thousands of people had been working around the clock, without food or sleep, for many, many days. “Keep up the good work and keep up respect for the rules of coordinating, of working together.” He also thanked them for dividing the work between them and of taking on countless tasks in “non-exposed” areas, media-wise and in other ways. He had never before seen so many organizations spread out so quickly to such large territories. “Let us stay coordinated”, he said.

Turning to operational matters, he said there had been a very good response to his most recent list of requirements. Offers of C-17 airplanes had been made by both the United States and the United Kingdom. He had also received a very generous offer, already in place, from Singapore, of a series of heavy lifting helicopters, landing boats, and two helicopter carriers, among other assets.

The extremely valuable assets from the United States' military were saving lives by the hour now; those assets had been increased, as only the United States could, over the last 48 hours. As those assets left, it must be ensured that enough military and civilian defence assets from other major contributors remained. The roads would not be repaired in Sumatra for several weeks. It would take months and, therefore, helicopters would be needed for a year or more. He would now "do a matrix" to determine what was available for which areas.

Asked what the United States had done in the last 48 hours, he said it had put 50 helicopters at the effort's disposal and was now promising to increase that number. In Darfur, he had had five helicopters, whereas he now had between 50 and 100 for the tsunami-affected areas, of which half had been provided by the United States, with the promise of more.

To one of many questions about the pledges, he said that Germany and Australia, alone, would give more than \$1 billion. That was "just incredible" and that came on top of the \$2.5 billion he had confirmed yesterday. At the moment, he was not really able to record all of the generous contributions, as they were flowing in so often and they were so big. They had to be confirmed many times to be sure that he and his team had heard right, "with the right number of zeros".

Replying to a question about what was motivating the giving -- whether competition, military gain or perhaps the first time for that kind of emergency -- he said there may be a host of explanations. He hoped the world had become better in 2005 than in 2004, when a total of \$5.8 billion in humanitarian assistance for the 100 countries where humanitarian operations were under way had been recorded. Twenty of those countries had "tsunami-style" emergencies. The \$5.8 billion was equivalent to maybe two or three days of global military spending, and for the 30 to 50 million people in desperate situations that was not a very impressive sum. This year was different -- this was the year of compassion, and the world should also be like this, he added.

He said if he could find a way of providing permanent shelter immediately as cheaply and as efficiently as tents, he would do it, he replied to criticism that the United Nations was wasting money on temporary shelter instead of on permanent housing. He wanted to be able to provide permanent shelter as soon as possible, but there was no way he could immediately put an estimated 1.5 million to 2 million homeless people into permanent shelters.

The team was already reaching out to hundreds of thousands of people with water and sanitation, but many hundreds of thousands still had inadequate or no services, he said in response to another question. That made him very nervous, and the problems were no greater than in Aceh or Sumatra, where he could not even judge whether half had had their needs met, or far fewer than that. In all other affected places, the efforts had passed the halfway mark in terms of providing basic services to everyone in need.

He said that if the world was taking funds for the tsunami victims from its usual "purse" for humanitarian relief, then that would spell destruction for programmes in Africa. If, however, the world was using additional funding for the tsunami, then this year would be different and Africa would also see more generosity. For some it was additional money, but for others it was not, and many had not yet decided. The year started with unprecedented generosity and could end with unprecedented stinginess, if there were no additional monies. If it was a "zero sum game", it would be very bad news for Guinea, the Congo and the Sudan. All major emergencies produced a lot of orphans and vulnerable children.

Asked to preview the flash appeal to be launched by the Secretary-General in a few hours, he said he could only say that, after another sleepless night in Geneva, his team had said it had finished the appeal and sent it to the printers. So, the Secretary-General would have an appeal to launch tonight, New York time. It was a big appeal, but it was "considerably less" than the sums already pledged, because the appeal was only for the initial emergency phase.

Pressed further to characterize the contributions as flowing from competition or compassion, he said that the pictures, the television coverage, had been the driving force. All countries in the world had virtually round-the-clock coverage of the emergency. There had been no such coverage of the 1.6 million refugees in Darfur, of the "tsunami" there, and the scorched earth tactics. Had there been television coverage, the response might have been comparable. The same applied to the Congo.

He added that some countries had lost many of their own citizens. In the Scandinavian countries, there was hardly a family that did not know somebody dead or missing in Thailand, for example. In addition, those in the region, such as Japan and Australia, wanted to help their own region. There were so many reasons.

Responding to a question about meeting the Millennium Development Goals, he said that many countries were very poor and started with a lot of problems. They could reach the Goals better now, with more generous contributions to emergencies. One of the biggest threats to meeting the Goals was the occurrence of natural disasters, which were on the rise. Better early warning systems and better prevention and preparedness would certainly help make societies more resilient.

To rumours that the earthquake had really been a nuclear test in the Indian Ocean, he said he wished to put a stop to those now. The seismic surveillance by people around the globe had shown exactly what was happening. There was a fault line where a big earthquake had occurred. He was awakened in the middle of the night and told there was a big earthquake, a big tsunami, and he thought, "okay, let's start the alarm bells".

There was a debate under way in many Arab countries regarding their level of generosity, he replied to another question. He had appealed to the many oil-rich nations for help, not only for the tsunami victims, but also for the forgotten and neglected emergencies in Africa, particularly in the Sudan. The 30 or 40 very affluent countries should give more of their riches.

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