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UNDP RESPONDS TO THE EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMIS IN ASIA

In the morning of 26 December, a massive earthquake of a magnitude 9 on the Richter scale, hit the west coast of Northern Sumatra, Indonesia, triggering tsunami waves that reached several countries of South and South East Asia, including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand. A second powerful earthquake of 7.3, and a series of aftershocks followed. Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India and Thailand have been the worst hit, but deaths were reported also in the coastal areas of Somalia. The overall death toll is now estimated to be at least 25,000 according to media reports and likely to rise as the search and rescue and assessment efforts progress.

The staff of the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) in both Delhi and Geneva are in on-going contact with its Country Offices in the region since the events occurred. UNDP released an initial **US\$500,000 in emergency funds** within the first 48 hours of the disaster. Also technical staff has been deployed to the most affected countries/areas with the aim to assist the UN family and government authorities to commence analysing the disaster situation in the context of recovery and development. The planning and conceptualization of early recovery efforts will ensure that risk reduction measures will be included into post-disaster reconstruction and development efforts.

In **India**, the disaster affected the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, West Bengal and Kerala. Official sources report of just over 3,000 deaths, while media sources indicate a far higher toll. The number of affected is estimated at tens of thousands which are displaced, homeless or unaccounted for. The Government is not appealing for international assistance at this stage and is handling the situation with its own capacities. UNDP released Trac 1.1.3 emergency resources in the amount of US\$100,000 to support coordination, logistics and assessment endeavours, and will continue to monitor the situation from its regional outpost in Delhi. The Government of India and the Country Team, in turn, have kindly offered to provide assistance to neighbouring countries in the form of national United Nations Volunteers, which have been trained and are experienced in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. They have provided valued services during other disasters such as the Sri Lanka floods in early 2004, and may again prove to be an asset to the affected countries.

In **Indonesia**, a UNDP staff will join an UNDAC team in an assessment mission to Aceh within the coming days, which shall provide detailed information on damages, needs and priorities. Almost 5,000 deaths have been reported with more than 50,000 people said to be displaced and many in dear need of medical assistance. The affected areas have suffered serious damage to public facilities, transport, telecommunications and electricity. UNDP released US\$100,000 Trac 1.1.3 emergency resources to support this and other priority endeavours of the country office. A UNDP BCPR recovery expert will be deployed tomorrow and one UNV from India is on stand-by for deployment to assist information coordination tasks.

The **Maldives** is among of the worst hit areas in the region. About 100,000 people are estimate to be affected with about 52 confirmed deaths. The Resident Coordinator preliminary estimates that the most pressing needs include boosting the Government's capacities and organising and providing shelter. About 50% of the houses have been assessed damaged or affected by the disaster throughout the country. A Trac 1.1.3 cash grant of US\$100,000 was released yesterday for coordination and assessment, and a UNDP BCPR Built Environment Specialist will be deplyed tomorrow to coincide with the UNDAC team on site. In addition, two UNVs from India will assist the Government on a longer-term

basis, to address both information management during the emergency phase as well as recovery planning needs.

For **Sri Lanka**, 2004 has been a particularly severe year in terms of natural disasters. Floods affected the country in May and again in December, and the effects of the earthquakes and tsunami waves have been especially severe on the country. Almost 12000 persons have been reported killed and approximately 1 million people affected with thousands of people still missing. A Trac 1.1.3 allocation of US\$100,000 has already been released to support ongoing assessment and coordination efforts. BCPR's Regional Disaster Reduction Advisor for South West Asia and one UNV have already arrived in Colombo on the evening of 27 December. Three additional UNVs will be deployed to assist field coordination and recovery activities.

In **Thailand** the worst hit areas include Ranong, Phang-Nga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang and Satun. The combined population of these provinces is 1.9 million, with many living in coastal areas. Government assessments speak of about 2,000 deaths and over 5,000 injured, and many more displaced persons. UNDP provided a cash grant of US\$100,000, which have been given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the transport of emergency items to the most affected areas.

Bangladesh, Malaysia have not requested international assistance at this stage. UNDP will continue to monitor the situation closely and will provide assistance as required.

For the second time in 2004, a natural disaster of considerable magnitude has simultaneously affected several countries. The Caribbean hurricane season and the earthquakes and tsunamis in Asia are yet another evidence that in terms of cause and consequence disaster risk is now becoming a global problem rather than an issue limited to hazard prone areas.

The Southern Asia disaster was in many ways unprecedented. It combined two phenomena, the outreach and force of which hit several countries and extensive coastal lines. Some of these countries were not considered amongst the most vulnerable to earthquakes in UNDP's recently published global report "Reducing Disaster Risk – A Challenge for Development" and its innovative Disaster Risk and Relative Vulnerability Indexes, although tsunamis are not explicitly included in this research. This is a clear indication of the dynamic nature of vulnerability and of the need to continue advocating for disaster risk reduction as part of the development agendas, even in countries where vulnerability has not been a traditional cause for concern.