

Jakartass and the Aceh Tsunami 2004

Posts written as news emerged.



Banda Aceh 2004

© Terry Collins aka **Jakartass** (<http://jakartass.net>)

Notes:

- Many of the links I originally gave are now dead, so I've done some minor editing.
- Blogging was the 'social media' in 2004. It has since been made semi-redundant by smart phones, Facebook, Twitter *et al.*

26th December 2004

Boxing Day Blues

A surfeit of good food, a healthy dose of good friends and happy kids to the good, and torrential rain, massive leaks and faulty electrics to the bad. That was going to be my post-Xmas story.

Then I heard the news about the earthquake and tsunami.

This makes my musings seem very trivial.

28th December (A)

C in Australia commented: *It is chilling how slowly coverage of the disaster (let alone the disaster itself) emerges from Indonesia, while 'shots' of other places were on TV on Sun evening those from Aceh etc. are barely emerging although the Indonesian TV news (daily half hour) gave some indications yesterday.*

So much for communication. What happens on the ground is of more importance. A paternalist or worse may ask 'just what would happen to any aid funds'?!?

The Jakarta Post has seen its traffic increase spectacularly, a strangely inappropriate word. It still gives the most relevant information and is, as I've said before, an honourable news source. So keep checking its stories.

The following, at 9.30 am, may give you some hope C, and, indeed, all of us. Firstly, SBY, who spent Xmas in the earthquake shattered province of Papua, is currently in Aceh displaying the 'hands on' approach lacking in three previous, still living, presidents. Vice President Kalla, also seeing the disaster for himself, is co-ordinating the aid programme.

The Army (TNI) has called a truce in its war against the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) so that both sides can focus their efforts on their humanitarian roles.

Note that at least 377 TNI personnel have been confirmed dead.

A major concern is that the current state of emergency in Aceh bars foreigners from entering the province. This may hamper the efforts of international agencies to assist. I say 'may', because they are obviously well positioned to oversee operations given their history of territorial control.

As for the 'slippage' of financial aid, given that the Governor of Aceh, Abdullah Puteh, went on trial for corruption yesterday, there may be less than expected.

Finally, C, yes it is true that news has been slow to emerge. Indonesia was in a soporific holiday mode. Apart from Metro TV, which is owned by an

Acehnese, Suryo Paleh, most TV stations continued their broadcasting of *dangdut* and quiz shows during the evening, as reported by Brandon of the Java Jive blog (<http://www.thejavajive.com/blog/tag/asian-tsunami/>).

That's it from me for now. I'll give a further personal perspective later. Thanks for your messages.

28th December (B)

Indonesian bloggers are rather quiet today with a couple of notable exceptions.



Banda Aceh before and after tsunami

I found this image of the path of the tsunami on Jerm's blog (<http://www.jermexpress.com/asian-tsunamis-kill-thousands/>).

This gives rise to the question of why countries further afield didn't receive sufficient warning of its arrival. *"At least two-thirds of the people who died should not have died," a natural disaster expert, Bill McGuire of University College London, told the Guardian. "They could have had an hour or so to get a kilometre or two inland or to reach high ground."*

Enda Nasution (<http://enda.goblogmedia.com/>) has compiled the following list for residents and visitors to make donations.

Aid in the form of tents, kitchen utensils, cemetery tools, medicine, baby foods, goods for women, generator set, clothes, blankets, fresh water can be left in local Welfare Offices (*Puskesmas*) or at Halim Perdanakusuma, the airport in South Jakarta.

The following **bank accounts** have been opened:

1. Indosiar

BCA, under the name of Indosiar: a/c no: 001 - 304 – 0009

2. RCTI

BCA, under the name of RCTI: a/c no: 128 - 300 -7000

3. Metro TV

BCA, Kedoya Baru branch: a/c no: 309 – 3007979

4. Coordinator of Peoples' Welfare, Rep. of Indonesia

Bank account under the name of Head of Welfare Bureau, I Nyoman Meweh:
BNI, Harmoni branch: a/c no: 07 000 311 2717 911.

Readers with details of other local appeals are asked to contact Jakartass,
Java Jive or Enda Nasution.

An online Candle Memorial for the Aceh victims *[could]* be viewed here:
<http://www.kaskus.co.id/>

Wikipedia is a good source for info:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake_and_tsunami

29th December

This appeal is being sent by British expats in Indonesia to the football teams they support. I'm addressing this appeal to my fellow Charlton Athletic fans. The club has had a very joyful December. Indonesia hasn't.

A Nation In Mourning

Dark clouds are casting a long shadow over Indonesia's capital city Jakarta at the moment. And it's not because of the rainy season or that the national side under the management of Peter Withe lost 2-1 at home to Malaysia in the semi finals of the Tiger Cup on Tuesday night (28/12). No, it's much worse than that. Much, much worse. Players of both sides were wearing black armbands that night for a very good reason indeed.

What has swung the mood from the usual year-end festive joy to one of utter despondency for Indonesians is the growing realization that many thousands of their countryfolk have perished in the recent tsunami that has caused death and destruction in coastal communities across Asia.

Aceh, a very rugged and remote region at the northernmost tip of the huge island of Sumatra, has been battered beyond belief.

Although Jakarta is completely unaffected, harrowing news footage has been broadcast into the capital city's homes. And TV broadcasters in Indonesia are not like the BBC or CNN. They do not shy away from showing the terrible consequences of a tragedy like this. One image in particular will be etched in my mind forever: seven or eight drowned babies placed side by side in a small room, with peaceful expressions on their innocent faces, but nonetheless lost forever.

And then there was the woman who had lost all her seven kids; she was left to curse the fact that she was still alive.

The death toll in Indonesia will be far higher than first expected. Initial reports suggested around 5,000 deaths; but the authorities are now looking at 30,000-40,000 plus. In one town on the western coast of Aceh, Meulaboh, a quarter of its 40,000 population have been wiped out.

Although nothing can be done to help those that have died, those still alive desperately need help. Many are starving, have no shelter and are at risk of contracting deadly diseases. The already poor communications and transport systems have to be built anew in order to reach these people.

If you are able to make a donation – however small – you would be helping to prevent people from dying.

IndonesiaHelp, a weblog ~ <http://indonesiahelp.blogspot.com/>, has been set up to give online information to donors.

Thank you.

Terry Collins

Jakarta Addick

(Note: The club responded magnificently, as did many others.)

30th December (A) - Heads In The Sand

Whilst the red and white flies at half mast throughout Indonesia there is indifference, if not downright callousness elsewhere.

Tony Blair, one of the leaders of the 'Free World', waited until yesterday before offering his prayers. Thanks, Tone.

The British Foreign Office updated its travel advisory:

We advise against all travel to Aceh, which is currently under a state of civil emergency, some parts of Maluku, especially Ambon, and some parts of Sulawesi, which are experiencing civilian unrest.

The west and north coasts of the province of Aceh on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia were hit by a large tsunami on 26 December, resulting in widespread flooding and damage. Tourists should avoid travel to these areas. This specific advice is in addition to our general advice against travel in Aceh because of security concerns.

"Security concerns"? The 'state of civil emergency' has been lifted and the Province of Aceh is now under central government control, with SBY spending much of this week there and VP Kalla is co-ordinating efforts in Jakarta.

"Foreign diplomats and volunteers, including doctors, social and humanitarian workers and engineers, have been given clearance to go to Aceh," Kalla said.

A visa-on-arrival facility can be obtained at Medan and Banda Aceh airports.

As for the civilian unrest elsewhere, Christian and Muslim communities in Ambon are working together to collect basic supplies and funds.

Elsewhere, in Phuket tourists are intent on not missing their holidays.
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1380747,00.html>)

Four days after the tidal wave hit, normal life has returned to much of Phuket and surrounding resorts such as Patong. The "girlie" bars are reopening, the bazaars selling rip-off Rolex watches are busy, and the tourists are streaming off flights and on to the beach.

The only problem ... was delays caused to commercial passenger flights by the unprecedented number of aircraft landing at the airport. The congestion is due to aid flights coming in and planes bearing the dead, injured and badly shaken out.

Back in Britain, my online friend Inspector Sands (*now offline*) is disgusted that the UK Daily Mail focuses on the deaths of three members of Lord Richard Attenborough's family.

"And now, foreign news - famous British man loses three members of his family, 69,000 foreigners also die."

To give the Daily Mail some credit, its online version [did] devote 238 words (only?) to its lead story: Tsunami disaster toll nears 100,000.

But it's not just the Brits who are self-obsessed. According to Tim Blair, some Pommie-bashers have been given too much attention in the press.
(<http://timblair.net/ee/index.php/weblog/2004/12/>)

Sydney couple Dave and Joanne Ali were on their honeymoon at Phutong Beach and were just getting out of bed when the first wave hit. Joanne Ali says they felt abandoned because many other countries were evacuating their nationals from the devastated region.

The pair - who, unlike 24,000 others, are not dead - were able to leave on their scheduled flight home.

And good riddance.

30th December (B) - Vigil in Jakarta

A prayer vigil is being held in Jakarta tonight.

Masli, the husband of Ida, a school friend of 'Er Indoors, has rung Ida from Banda Aceh to say that there is no trace of their house. Inside were Yuli, 24, wife of Abрал, and their year old daughter, Novi, 22, due to graduate as a

doctor next year and Cut Nong, 12, awaiting school results in order to enrol in junior high here in Jakarta.

Hope has been extinguished.

Most of Abrial's family is missing as well. He was in Medan on business when the tsunami struck.

We never saw Ida's granddaughter, but she and her daughters visited here several times, the last time being Idul Fitri last year. Another daughter, Dewi, stayed with us for six months to complete her schooling whilst the rest of the family ran a restaurant in Banda Aceh.

This feeling of loss is shared by many, many thousands of families across Indonesia and in the other affected countries around the Indian Ocean.

It is impossible to find adequate words.

31st December - You have to try to do your bit.

The response from countries far away, such as the UK, has been heart warming; from individuals, such as children selling their Xmas presents, to the English Premier League donating £1m.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1381279,00.html>)

The online community has generally responded well too.

- We bloggers share personal accounts (<http://phukettsunami.blogspot.com/>):
"Everyone seemed to have a role. Mine was that of news reporter. Telephone company. And someone who was trying to bring some facts into the situation. And I also served as a listener."

- There are pointers to resources and appeals for aid:

(http://tsunamihelp.blogspot.com/2004_12_01_archive.html) and a vast range of information has been contributed to the Wiki Encyclopaedia:

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake_and_tsunami).

This is the power of the individual; the sum of the parts making a collective difference. Whilst news gathering from Aceh remains the province of news correspondents such as the Guardian's John Aglionby questions are now being raised about the effectiveness of the aid efforts.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1381279,00.html>)

The problem is twofold: the need for co-ordination and the lack of transport and communications infrastructures.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda said today that heads of state or their special representatives from the tsunami-affected countries, as well as major aid donors and international organisations, would be invited to an international tsunami summit on Jan. 6th. "The meeting is aimed at

consolidating joint commitment for emergency assistance and also for future rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected countries," he said.

But there is an urgency to get much needed food and medicines to the survivors now, not next week.

"The indications are the disaster is going to be a lot worse than we have anticipated already," United Nations Children's Fund communications director John Budd said in Jakarta. "Aceh really is ground zero... there are miles and miles and miles of nothing."

Budd said there was a desperate shortage of food and fuel across the remote province, which had already suffered from a lack of infrastructure due to a decades-long violent battle between separatist rebels and the government. So it doesn't help that Indonesian troops are still conducting their war against the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

fr. Jakarta Post

While volunteers, security officers and families are busy collecting and searching for the bodies of victims killed in Sunday's catastrophic tsunami in Aceh, soldiers are continuing their offensive against separatist rebels. A recent cease-fire offered by the military for Free Aceh Movement (GAM) members, whose hideouts were not affected by the tsunami, appear to be mere rhetoric.

Other countries seem to have their priorities better organised.

A U.S. carrier battle group is due to anchor off Sumatra island today to spearhead an unprecedented multinational military effort to assist the survivors of last weekend's quake and tsunami.

"The United States is not there to take over the rescue or relief effort," an unnamed official said. "We are there to provide whatever help they decide they need."

Presumably as part of the "multinational military effort", Singapore is opening up its air and naval bases to countries seeking to send relief supplies into tsunami-wracked Indonesia, Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean said on Friday. Airport facilities at Banda Aceh and Medan, nearest the devastated areas, are "currently overstretched," he told a news briefing.

Things are going to get worse, much worse in Aceh and North Sumatra.

John Budd of SCF said: "There's no food, there's no fuel, it's a cruel situation. If we get food in, say, rice, there is no pure water or fuel to cook it. We are desperately trying to break this cycle."

We must continue to do our bit, not only in 2005 but in the years ahead.

2nd January 2005 - Media Views

Observer Leader

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/leaders/story/0,6903,1382182,00.html>

The tools of the modern media mean that connection can be expressed with an immediacy that would seem extraordinary to any other generation, allowing us to witness what the first reporters on the scene were able to see, in particular through the superb journalism of the world's media, and share an immediate sense of global grief.

John Aglionby – Jakarta resident / Guardian-Observer correspondent

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1382008,00.html>

Looking at the landscape that was once Leupueng I was suddenly angry: there was obsessional attention being paid to perhaps a few thousand European holidaymakers who had died elsewhere when tens of thousands of people had perished here on Sumatra's west coast.

Observer Travel

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/travel/story/0,6903,1381900,00.html>

As the extent of the devastation wreaked by the tsunami unfolds, many of us are having to decide whether going ahead with planned holidays will help or hinder the local people.

Observer Review

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,1382030,00.html>

The new World Service series, Adventures in the Tourist Trade, was obviously recorded before the tsunami disaster. It will be interesting to see if they drop the final destination in the series, Thailand.

Last week the spotlight was Faliraki, on the Greek island of Rhodes, whose reputation for clubbing, binge-drinking and sex makes Benidorm look like Frinton-on-Sea. Following the deaths of two British holidaymakers last year, tourism to the island is down by 50 per cent.

In the light of what has happened to all those Indian Ocean resorts destroyed last week, the hotel and bar owners of Rhodes should be grateful for small mercies.

2nd January - There is little that this blogger can do

Reportage is left to those in the frontline areas and with the world's media mobilized around a single issue more than at any time since, I assume, World War II, we world citizens are free to choose those words and images which suit.

Many are the heroes, tourists who have stayed to help with relief work, reporters who encapsulate our feelings of inadequacy in the face of the Indonesian government's slow response.

And our friend Masli refuses to give up hope for his daughters lost in Banda Aceh.

I am concerned that I have seemingly been the only blogger here in Indonesia writing in English, other than the occasional heartfelt contributions of Java Jive. The Guardian has linked to both our blogs as have a number of others. Whilst we have attempted to give our individual expat perspectives, Enda Nasution set up Indonesia Help (<http://indonesiahelp.blogspot.com/>), an informational resource. Enda had added me as a co-administrator.

Jakarta is still in the running for the Indonesia Blog Award 2004, as voting will not now close until Tuesday. It looks as if I will win, but I will take little pleasure in this. Next year, Indonesian bloggers must start to embrace the 'freedom' to use the tool, to air and share our concerns for a better managed country.

Statistics serve to numb. The main concern must be the aftermath. It is too late to apportion blame, although some do. Those who believe that there should have been an effective warning system are right. Those who argue that the decimation of coastal mangroves in order to build tourist resorts has been a major cause of the horrific death toll are also right.

A fundamental shift in thinking is an imperative. Let some good come from all this. Jakarta for one will focus on what can be done in the years ahead. We are in a Changing World (<http://worldchanging.com/>): let us embrace it.

2nd January – A reply to an ex-colleague ...

... who believes that 20/20 hindsight explains everything. This is an extract from his email: The time of the earthquake was recorded as 7:58:53 (local time)

Surah Al A'raaf (The Heights) (QS 7:58)

58. *The vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the Permission of its Lord; and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but (a little) with difficulty. Thus do We explain variously the Ayât (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for a people who give thanks.*

This verse talks about fertile and non-fertile land. Aceh in North Sumatra is famous throughout Indonesia as a fertile area. Now that large sections of land have been flooded with salty sea water, it's probably not as fertile as before. So 7:58 signifies Aceh; the once fertile and now non-fertile (devastated) land.

But it was not the earthquake at 7.58 am that destroyed Aceh. The damage was caused by what followed: i.e. the tsunami.

Following 7:58 is verse 7:59...

59. Indeed, We sent Nûh (Noah) to his people and he said: "O my people! Worship Allâh! You have no other Ilâh (God) but Him. (Lâ ilâha illallâh: none has the right to be worshipped but Allâh). Certainly, I fear for you the torment of a Great Day!"

And this was my reply:

From: [Jakartass](#)

To: [Friend](#)

Sent: Saturday, January 01, 2005 3:21 PM

Subject: Re: Aceh & Verses from Al Qur'an (updated)

Hi Gene,

I am saddened that you believe some divine intervention is the cause of both the tsunami and the consequent suffering.

The earthquake, with its resulting tsunami, could not, in itself, have been predicted with any great accuracy although one of this scale was due given the encyclical nature of these events and that it took place on a major faultline prone to earthquake activity.

That the majority of resulting deaths could have been avoided is also undeniable; with a worldwide network of communications, warnings should have been given around the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, Aceh bore the early brunt, yet if the province hadn't been plundered for the past 30 years, if the wealth of the province had been invested for the benefit of its inhabitants rather than the corrupt elite, both here and among the multi-national oil companies, then there would have been escape routes for many.

Bear in mind too that it is the lack of an infrastructure which is now hampering the immense efforts of the relief organisations.

Please read this article by Martin Kettle:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2004/dec/28/religion.comment>

1. An entirely understandable reaction to such an event is to set one's face against any large questions that it may raise. But this week provides an unsought opportunity to consider the largest of all human implications of any major earthquake: its challenge to religion.

2. God preserve us from religious people who attempt to "explain" the tsunami disaster. Explanations are based on theories, and to theorise about suffering is to degrade those who suffer.

Belief in God enables us to respond to disasters such as this, but not to trump scientific explanations with moral ones. However, people of faith look to a horizon beyond the limitations of scientific enquiry and secular morality. It is a horizon at the limits of time and space beyond which eternity provides

a perspective which might yet make sense of what science can only explain.

John Lincoln

Bishop of Lincoln

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/letters/story/0,,1380365,00.html>)

3. The tsunami has been a dark revelation, showing that despite our technology, we are still utterly helpless in the face of natural catastrophe. But it has also brought to light an unexpected unity and sympathy. European and Asian people suffered together at a time when east and west seemed hopelessly divided, and the massive international effort, which has transcended political and religious affiliations, is an image of a cooperation that could become a reality in our polarised world.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1381643,00.html>)

Gene, your faith may give you hope, but do not (seemingly) condemn others who do not share your particular beliefs.

I have hope and a hopefully not misplaced faith that the scale of this disaster will lead to a greater co-operation between the peoples of the world. Nothing can now be seen in terms of black and white (or Muslim and Christian).

We have the tools to make a better world but do we have the strength to put aside our personal - nay, selfish - credos in order to work together for the sake of humanity?

Jakartass

4th January - Let us prey

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/naturaldisasters/story/0,7369,1382850,00.html>)

Simon Winchester argues that the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883 led to Indonesian independence. *For all the world knew, the end of life itself could have been at hand.*

The world thus turned to its old standby: religion. It ascribed the event's ultimate cause to God. It ascribed its proximate cause to some act of man that had made God angry. And it acted to expunge the cause of that anger - and did so very quickly indeed.

In the case of Krakatoa, the Muslim prelates of Java first made this connection. The eruption that had killed so many and had ruined so much was clearly, they said, the work of Allah - a divine who was, so the mullahs told their Javanese congregations of the day, supremely irritated that so many of their number were passively allowing themselves to be ruled by white infidel outsiders, the Dutch. To appease the sorely tried Allah, the mullahs said, the Dutch had to be killed and their influence expunged. Rise up, they advised.

And so they did - in a piecemeal fashion at first, in an organised rebellion five

years later, and in a measured and defiant way in the decades that followed.

The Dutch were eventually forced to leave; Indonesia, born out of the Hollanders' imperial fiefdom, remains today the world's most populous Islamic nation.

Krakatoa was not the cause of the birth of Indonesia, far from it; but it was a sign, a trigger, and it remains a significant moment in Indonesian political history for that very reason.

So now we have to consider the aftermath of the biggest natural disaster to hit Indonesia since then.

Ed Cairns, Oxfam's senior policy adviser called on the affected governments and donors to commit themselves to "reconstruction plus", aimed at reducing poverty and protecting the environment.

"They should commit to support this for the long-term, no less than five years. Donor governments should provide grants, not loans, and aid should not be tied to benefit Japanese, American or European companies."
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1382912,00.html>)

Indonesia is planning to impose a one-year state of emergency in its devastated Aceh province, followed by a four-year recovery plan. The move will initially focus on people's immediate needs - food, clothing and temporary shelter - but then switch to rebuilding infrastructure.

George Monbiot asks, *"Why, when extreme poverty could be made history with a minor redeployment of public finances, must the poor world still wait for homeless people in the rich world to empty their pockets?"*

"The obvious answer is that governments have other priorities. And the one that leaps to mind is war. If the money they have promised to the victims of the tsunami still falls far short of the amounts required, it is partly because the contingency fund upon which they draw in times of crisis has been spent on blowing people to bits in Iraq."
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1382932,00.html>)

This past week has seen the greatest ever demonstration of communal compassion.

It is also seeing some of the most bestial crimes against humanity. How else can one describe traffickers in Acehnese orphans? Similar language should also be deployed to describe those pirates reportedly plundering ships carrying aid to the devastated province.
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1382750,00.html>)

5th January - Today's three-minute silence ...

(12 noon GMT – 7pm Aceh time) *is something to welcome - a tiny first step in the long struggle to narrow the divide between first and third worlds, to accord Asians and Africans the same value that we accord westerners.* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1383451,00.html>)

This is, of course, part of the argument against the inequalities between the rich and the poor. In Britain, *according to the Charities Aid Foundation, the wealthiest 10% of UK income earners give just 0.7% of their household expenditure to charity, while the poorest 10% allocate 3% of theirs.*

Here in Indonesia, at the Stock Exchange, shares are at a record high. *Dealers expect the market Wednesday to trade higher on follow-through buying in infrastructure-related companies. This refers to cement and heavy equipment companies on expectations that their fortunes will improve this year due to reconstruction efforts in the areas devastated by last week's earthquake and tsunami.*

And there is still no news from the Cendana clan; ex-President Suharto and his children and cronies, who still control massive fortunes and business empires, have been conspicuous in their silence.

7th January

I have to say that the three-minute silence observed across Europe in remembrance of the victims of the Sumatran tsunami, and widely covered on TV here, was much appreciated here in Indonesia (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami/story/0,15671,1383973,00.html>,

... even though doubts have been expressed by several bloggers.

If three minutes is the new going rate for remembering disaster, then three minutes I'll gladly give. But, just to keep my three minutes in casualty-sized perspective, I'll be remembering the Western tourist dead for less than ten seconds and the local inhabitants for the remainder. (<http://diamondgeezer.blogspot.com/2005/01/history-of-two-three-minutesilence-at.html>).

Although flags at half-mast are less in evidence, we Jakarta residents have had other signs of the world's support.

Crossing the bridge over the toll road in front of Carrefour this morning, I had to wend my way past four soldiers toting long-barrelled guns. The roads across town were surprisingly jam free; I suspect that other residents were similarly fearful of the armed forces lining the roads up to the Jakarta Convention Centre where many of the world's leaders were gathering.

It's nice to know that the soldiers could be spared from their twin duties in Aceh, helping the refugees and chasing separatists.

According to the Asian Forum, media reports and witness accounts from the ground indicate that survivors are again facing imminent threats to their lives, this time due to relief operations which are being seriously hampered by military control in Aceh.

Some blame the US neocons. The American military are undoubtedly doing an excellent job in Aceh, but their leaders, in the name of the war on terrorism, attempt to bolster the repressive military. GAM reports that the Indonesia military is using the catastrophe to launch a new offensive. Meanwhile, the army reports that rebels on a fishing boat fired on Thursday at soldiers and tsunami victims on the devastated western coast of Aceh province.

For a mere blogger, it is hard to know where the truth lies.

What is fairly clear, however, is that the public face of yesterday's Jakarta Summit produced more platitudes.

"We expressed our continuing commitment to assist the affected countries and their people in order to fully recover from the catastrophic and traumatic effects of the disaster, including in their mid- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts." And "We believe that through concerted efforts, spurred by a spirit of compassion and sacrifice and endurance, together, we will prevail in overcoming this catastrophe."

For some, the one day affair *"reeked of hypocrisy and self interest."*
(<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2005/01/tsun-j07.html>)

What hasn't been agreed to is the following, so I make no apologies for reproducing this leaked Asian Forum press statement in full. I agree with it 100%.

Six Points on Tsunami Humanitarian Challenge from a Human Rights Perspective

The tsunamis hitting South Asia have created unprecedented havoc in the affected countries. The world has been heartened to see the outpouring of donations, of volunteerism, and indeed, of the heroic acts of bravery that have saved many lives. At the same time, they have also brought to light and aggravated some existing weaknesses in accountability structures, emergency response, and the gaps between civil society and governments that, if properly bridged, would maximize the impact of interventions for the benefit of the most vulnerable. We want to highlight the following six areas of special concern.

1. The beginning of an effective response must be a proper assessment of the situation and acknowledgement of the challenges. There must be

openness in the affected areas to humanitarian agencies, which is being seen in many of the affected countries, and an increasing openness is being seen elsewhere. We urge for unimpeded access in all areas by independent assessors.

2. Humanitarian considerations must be paramount. Reports of undocumented victims fearful of expulsion indicate that many of these victims are unable to receive the help they need. We urge all actors to deal with their cases with the same humanitarian considerations as all victims, and for the relevant authorities to publicly issue assurances that they will be so treated.

3. The damage so far tallied points to another looming crisis already emerging of large numbers of displaced persons. Many of them will face immediate problems of unverifiable legal status, access to housing and essential services, separation from their families, and possibly vulnerability to trafficking. We strongly recommend that measures be taken as soon as possible to stabilize their status and access to services with full respect for their human rights, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

4. Many of the victims of the tsunamis were already victims of conflict. The crisis should be responded to in a way that promotes dialogue for peace. Where not already done, parties to conflict should immediately agree on a cease-fire. Further, we strongly recommend that the transition from immediate life-saving measures to recovery and reconstruction should include the establishment of mechanisms for dialogue between civil society and government. By enabling the affected communities to have a voice already in the delivery of aid, the seeds for long-term dialogue and conflict resolution could be sown in the midst of this disaster.

5. The inescapable fact that many of the victims in the region were already among the most marginalized in their societies gives added urgency to reconstruction, for these persons have little or no assets of their own on which to rebuild their lives. Reconstruction must therefore focus on the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, in a way that respects the culture, traditions and dignity of the victims.

6. Rehabilitation efforts must avoid the re-victimization of the victims. By enabling an inequitable distribution of resources and monopolization of decision-making authority by persons or groups with vested interests, a lack of effective and transparent accountability and participation mechanisms would compound the problems faced by the most vulnerable victims. Already the shadow of a black market in foodstuffs and other aid items or extraction of bribes for access to them is appearing in some places. The converse is also true. Taking

steps now to ensure accountability, transparency and accountability would ensure that resources are directed to where they are most needed, that they are used in ways that best benefit the victims, and protect them from abuse of power.

15th January - Sea Bridge to Aceh

From websites no longer online: <http://www.mentawai.com/aceh1.html>
<http://www.tolong.net/electriclamb/>

The world is helping Banda Aceh city but the reality is that more people have been killed and displaced on the West Coast of Aceh than in the capital city.

A thriving community of 15,000 has been very nearly erased. More than 6,000 are confirmed dead, over 4,000 are missing, 2,000 are living under tarps and several thousand are camped in the hills terrified to turn to ground zero.

Food is desperately short, people are drinking river water and disease has depleted the meagre stock of drugs that have been air-dropped to the 20 or so overworked medics and aid workers in the area. The port infrastructure has vanished.

The navy ships and chopper support are focusing on Meulaboh but the reality is that there are thousands of people in smaller and more remote communities North and South who have not had any assistance since the quake.

Our mission is to build a Sea Bridge to Aceh, to reach the thousands who are homeless, hurt, hungry and traumatized.

26th January - Tsunami souvenirs

As the Jakarta Post says today, “It has been exactly one month since the magnitude-9 earthquake and tsunami devastated parts of Aceh and North Sumatra. Such time should be sufficient for us to assess and absorb the implications of this unprecedented calamity, not only for those directly in the path of the disaster, but also for the rest of the nation.”

Coming home in the mobile market that is Jakarta’s commuter train service, I was offered a VCD of the tsunami for Rp.5,000 (= UK 30p / US 60c). I didn’t buy and I’m now wondering if I should have.

The dilemma is that in this televisual world I do feel it is important to have a record of what will probably be the most significant event in our lifetimes. Its

Xmas timing, suddenness and ferocity and our seeming incapacity to have

mitigated its effects through prediction, warnings and adequate coastal defences have caused much needed examination of how we function as the self-called 'higher species'.

Yet, who would benefit from the purchase? Apart from a small commission to the folk trying to earn their daily rice, the bulk of the price would only benefit, if that's the right word, a Mr. Big somewhere who is not interested in the plight of those who have lost nigh on everything and has lifted images from TV.

Now if, say, Metro TV were to produce a documentary from its archives and were to donate the profits to its Tsunami Aid fund, then I feel the purchase would have some value.

There are some good things to arise from the tsunami. Apart from the huge spontaneous and unprecedented collective outpouring of donations, there are signs emerging of a significant shift in perceptions concerning the role of civic communal action and a recognition of our place in the ecosphere.

The Electric Lamb Mission has now arrived in Meulaboh and is providing regular updates with pictures of its efforts to reach survivors who have not yet been helped on the west coast. Already, the Sea Bridge is working! The mother ship enables large amounts of cargo to be moved amongst remote places.

On January 14th, Indonesia announced a massive replanting of mangroves fr. Wikipedia: *The roots of the mangrove plants stabilize the sand and mud. In areas of the world where mangroves have been removed for development purposes, the coastline has been subject to rapid erosion. They also provide a habitat for wildlife and serve as a natural buffer to strong winds and waves.*

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has contributed to a report (http://www.unep.org/tsunami/reports/damage_assessment.pdf) on the environmental impact of the tsunami in Aceh. It is an impressive document of 126 pages which will take some time to take in.

Klaus Toepfer, UNEP's Executive Director, said, "*These latest findings from just one of the affected countries show that there have been significant consequences for the environment and for the livelihoods of local people as a result of the tsunami. They underline how the environment can be both a victim and both a buffer against vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters*".

This issue, namely the central role of a healthy environment in long-term disaster risk reduction, had been taken on board by delegates at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction which closed last Friday (22nd) in the Japanese city of Kobe, he said.

“First and foremost we must continue to respond to the terrible human tragedy and humanitarian relief effort in Indonesia, and other countries affected by the tsunami. But, it is clear that the recovery and reconstruction process underway must also invest in the environmental capital of natural resources, the forests, mangroves, and coral reefs that are nature’s buffer to such disasters and their consequences.”

Among critical coastal habitats in Aceh and North Sumatra, 25,000 hectares (ha) of mangroves, 30 % of 97,250 ha of previously existing coral reefs, and 20 % of 600 ha of seagrass beds have been damaged according to the new report. The economic loss is valued at \$118.2 million, \$332.4 million, and \$2.3 million respectively.

Elsewhere, the Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in emergency session, stressed that *“the future of tourism in the impacted region highly depends on a normal tourism process in destinations so popular among thousands of tourists, seeking relaxation in unspoilt nature among friendly hosts.”*

So, they won’t be going in droves to Aceh then.

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Postscript.

Both Masli and Ida died within two years of the tsunami.



We believe it was from broken hearts.



Banda Aceh 2014