



Tsunami Briefing

January 14, 2005

Partners International is committed to timely and accurate reporting on what we are doing together with our indigenous partner ministries to relieve the suffering, and contribute to the recovery of lives and communities, of those affected by the earthquake-spawned tsunamis. Partners International is a church-planting ministry that already has local partners on the scene who are able to help in relief and development in a culturally and economically appropriate way, and for the long term. We will provide these briefings as relevant information becomes available.

This fifth *Tsunami Briefing* contains another excerpt from the journal of Partners International's Area Director in Indonesia during the assessment team's trip to Aceh province, January 8-11, plus reports from India and Sri Lanka.

INDONESIA

From the journal of our Area Director in Indonesia:

The further south we proceeded with our assessment trip, the more military personnel we encountered. The government has been engaged in an armed conflict for many years with separatist rebels. Driving up and down the road were armored personnel carriers with soldiers manning the machine turrets at the top. At the first disaster area where we stopped, we quickly felt that things were different. Instead of the community cleaning up the debris, soldiers were out in clean-up crews.



A family at a refugee camp.

More earthquake damage was evident in this region than in other areas that we visited. Periodically we would find places where the tsunami wiped away a section along the coast. However, we did not see the complete devastation evident in Banda Aceh.

As we traveled back to Medan, armored personnel carriers plying the road were replaced with permanent machine gun nests every half a mile along the road, vivid reminders that the armed struggle in Aceh was still active. Another image also stuck in my mind. Nowhere in my travels around Indonesia had I seen so many large mosques. These village mosques were the biggest of any place I have been. The homes around the mosques were very simple and small. One could easily understand why these houses were swept away in the tsunami. But the four-story tall mosques towered over them. In many of the tsunami-affected areas, only these mosques were left standing.

As we traversed the entire length of the north and east coast, we did not see a single church building. But the moment we crossed over the provincial boundary and entered the province of North Sumatra, things dramatically changed. Not far from the border, I noticed four churches in a single village!

INDIA

Vinnarasu Association of India (VAI)

Partners International began assisting this ministry in the aftermath of the tsunami crisis (see *Briefing* from January 6, page 4). It is led by Dr. Mathias who was trained as a master trainer by Joshua Vision India, a long-standing partner of ours. This report is from one of Dr. Vijayam's staff who on January 7-8 visited five of the villages in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu State in South India where Dr. Mathias and his associates are providing relief aid.

There was plenty of evidence of the enormity of the tidal wave and the destruction it left behind. The villages are a picture of desolation—thousands of houses, which were once bustling with activity of the fishing community, are now abandoned. The waters came inland as far as two kilometers in some of the low-lying areas, catching the people unawares. Fishing boats were lifted and thrown far away from the sea into the middle of houses and streets. We could see marks of the water level as high as 6-8 feet in these houses, which were flooded, carrying along with it all that was in the house including steel furniture. Most of the weaker houses with tiled or thatched roofs were completely destroyed.

Each family has a story to tell. An old leper who was living in a hut with a small picture of Jesus' crucifix told how God saved him. He has no fingers or toes on his hands and feet. He can't walk. He said that when he heard the strange sound he turned back and saw this huge wave coming at a terrifying speed. He made a desperate bid to save his life by running on all four limbs, the wave missing him by a couple of yards as he reached higher ground. He tells his experience to everyone who visits him.

People are slowly trickling back to where their once-dear homes existed. They are trying to pick up life from scratch. Schools are closed for relief purposes and will remain so for some time, which means children's education is affected.

There are many relief camps set up in churches and schools. The relief camp in an Alenkottai church, which I visited, was catering to the needs of about 450 families that are sleeping all over the church compound with little or no belongings, waiting to return to their homes. Though they have enough to eat at present, they wear blank faces as the bleak future stares at them. Most families are not able to comprehend the sudden change in their fortunes in a matter of a few seconds. I see that the phase of immediate relief work is soon coming to an end. The need of the hour is therefore rehabilitation, which can be a long-term help for the survivors.

Dr. Mathias lives in a town close to the tsunami-hit villages in Kanyakumari District. He has a good team



Collapsed houses at Kolachel village.



Damaged houses at Chinnavilai village.

of 12-15 committed Christians and several volunteers actively involved in the relief work. He has a good strategy and plans to take up the much-needed rehabilitation work. Dr. Mathias is in good standing with other NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and is a part of the network formed for this task.

This network has identified 30 villages along the coast of which Dr. Mathias and his team have targeted 10-15 in close proximity to his work. He has divided his team into four groups entrusting each group with three villages for research, and then narrowing it down to two villages for each group to take up rehabilitation work. He and his team are well accepted. He plans to assist about 100 families in rehabilitation. His main focus is on children and widows victimized by the tsunami. He would like to assist them in many of their needs of which I mention some below:

- Assisting them in building permanent shelters.
- Providing children with textbooks, journals, and other study materials.
- School uniforms or clothing as needed.
- Conducting remedial coaching classes in the evening for the children.
- Starting prayer cells and self-help groups among the women.
- Stress-handling centers to train volunteers from among the victims in stress management.

SRI LANKA

National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL)

This is another ministry Partners International began supporting since the tsunami disaster (see *Briefing* from January 6, page 4). Here is one of their reports:

Since the night of December 26, less than 24 hours after the deadly tsunami waves caused devastation to the coast of Sri Lanka, the NCEASL relief supply trucks have been rolling into affected areas. During these efforts, in the midst of indescribable suffering and devastation, we encountered a few glimpses of hope and encouragement. We wish to share these with you, so that you too will be encouraged, knowing that you have made a difference.

NCEASL staff in Colombo, regional staff, and volunteers worked round the clock to get essential food, medicine, and other supplies to people in need within a short time. The initial response was 24 hours.

In the Vadamarachchi division in Jaffna District, some 2,636 people who survived the tsunami were seeking shelter in refugee camps. They had lost everything; over 13,700 houses have been destroyed, and over 2,500 bodies have been recovered. They were cold, hungry, crying over lost loved ones. Some were in shock, speechless, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster that had befallen them. They did not expect help to arrive anytime soon, and spent a restless night.

The day after the disaster, much to the astonishment of the refugees, a truck arrived bearing food supplies for 225 families to last a week. This was the first of several loads of supplies sent by NCEASL, and the first to reach the hungry survivors. They ran to the truck with joy and disbelief. "How did you get to us so fast?" they asked. An additional 622 families were provided with emergency relief.

The coastal belt in the southern district of Matara was also reeling from the disaster. The beautiful beaches were dotted with fishing villages and tourist hotels. Within minutes there was nothing more than piles of rubble where houses and hotels stood. Wrecked boats and thousands of dead bodies littered the area. The survivors gathered in temporary refugee camps.

Although some relief supplies reached them through various agencies, there was nothing to feed babies. Desperate mothers tried to rock hungry children to sleep; there was nothing more they could do. They had lost everything, and there were no houses or shops standing in the area. On December 27, another NCEASL truck rolled in. Food or water, they thought. They could not believe their eyes when they saw the truck loaded with infant milk formula packs! The team was able to distribute milk for 1,000 infants.

Kilinochchi is an area in the north which is mostly under LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) control. Parts of it are under the control of Sri Lankan military forces. Not too long ago, prior to the ceasefire that now exists, this area witnessed bitter fighting between the two groups.

The guns have been silent for a while, but there was unease as there was growing fear that the fragile ceasefire would break down any time. The tsunami-injured survivors from the coastal area of Kilinochchi were housed in the Kilinochchi hospital, while the others were housed in two school buildings. On December 27, a truck laden with food and supplies arrived at the military checkpoint. It was not allowed in as the guards on duty feared it was a trick—an attempt by the “other side” to infiltrate their area. “How could relief supplies arrive so quickly?” they questioned. Upon discovering that the truck was carrying supplies from NCEASL, it was immediately waved through, to carry precious food and supplies to the people. In the hospital and the school halls the survivors were amazed. Over 2,100 patients in the hospital and others seeking shelter in the schools were given supplies. There were tears in their eyes. “We would have starved if not for you,” they said.

