



Tsunami Briefing

January 24, 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 seventh *Tsunami Briefing* reproduces an article that appeared in the January 21, 2005, issue of *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), based on an interview with Mark Bardwell, Partners International's Projects Coordinator. In addition, this *Briefing* contains an extended excerpt from Mark's report.

"It looked like a bomb had gone off." Mark Bardwell, Partners International

Spokane man returns from Aceh

Partners International delivers supplies to area ravaged by tsunami

By Virginia de Leon, Staff writer, January 21, 2005

He was shocked to see all the bodies.

More than a week after the tsunami struck Indonesia's Aceh province, Mark Bardwell of Spokane was taken aback by the corpses that still lay amid the rubble and the smell of death that permeated the air.

"What struck me most was the destruction," said Bardwell, who returned last week from the area hardest hit by the Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami. "It looked like a bomb had gone off. People had no chance to escape."



Mark Bardwell, Projects
Coordinator, Partners International

Bardwell, projects coordinator for Spokane-based Partners International, left for Indonesia on Jan. 4 to help with the organization's long-term relief efforts in the area.

For the past five years, Partners International — a ministry that has started and grown churches throughout the world — has worked with the minority Christian population of the Aceh province. So when the tsunami struck, Partners International already had "partners" on the scene — people indigenous to the area who know the local customs and speak Acehnese — to help immediately.

Three days after the tragedy, an Indonesian relief team supported by Partners International delivered a

truckload of supplies — including medicine, 5 tons of rice and 700 boxes of bottled water — to Banda Aceh. A week later, Bardwell flew in from Spokane to help develop a relief strategy and provide crisis management training for Christian agencies working with survivors.

"Somebody from this office needed to be there to get a real sense of what was happening," said Steven Downey, vice president of communications and marketing for Partners International, a nonprofit with about 30 employees in Spokane and hundreds of partners in 57 countries.

It took two days for Bardwell to fly into Aceh, located at the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The airport in Medan, located inland, was crowded with people looking for relatives, relief workers, reporters and photographers — all jostling to get on a plane for the tsunami-ravaged coast.

Bardwell's luggage got lost, so he wore the same pair of pants during the 12 days he spent in Indonesia. But the lack of clothing was a mere inconvenience compared to the devastation he witnessed and the stories he heard, said Bardwell, who grew up in Zambia and Kenya and has traveled all over Africa on behalf of Partners International.

At the camps where people sought help and searched for family members, he met a woman and her young son who survived the giant wave but spent five days floating at sea. Another man told him how he and his wife ran as fast as they could away from the big, black wall of water only to have the wave wash his wife away.

A father in search of his daughter approached Bardwell one day with her photograph. He was desperate, but no one had the heart to tell him that he would likely never find his little girl. Because of the many deaths, people had no way to identify the corpses strewn among the wreckage of buildings, Bardwell said. Once retrieved, the bodies were buried in mass graves.

Thousands of families in search of loved ones will never know what happened to them, said Bardwell, 39, and a father of two. "There's no closure for them. . . . When you deal with that much pain and loss, it will have repercussions for years."

As part of his work there, Bardwell helped train workers from indigenous and foreign Christian relief agencies on grief counseling.

"Our work is not only the physical rebuilding of homes," Downey said. "We're also concerned about the emotional and spiritual rebuilding."

Unlike most relief agencies, which respond to the immediate needs of survivors by providing food, medicine and other basic needs, Partners International is focused on the long-term development of the area. It will be involved in rebuilding schools and houses, as well as shrimp ponds, fish farms and other industries that were destroyed by the tsunami.

The organization had a presence there even before the disaster, Downey said, and it will continue to be there a year from now and long after. Donors from all over the country have contributed more than \$300,000 to help with Partners International's efforts in Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka.



Scene of destruction in Banda Aceh.

"This is a long-term venture," Partners International's area director in Indonesia wrote in a recent update. "The role of Christians, in addition to providing essential food, water and medical aid, is to share the comfort and hope that comes from a Savior who knows what it is to suffer terribly. . . . People in greatest need yearn to talk about God and life and how to make sense of loss and pain."

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Report from Partners International's Projects Coordinator, Mark Bardwell

Thank you again for your prayers during my recent "surprise" trip to Indonesia. I left Spokane January 4 for Aceh province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, and returned on the 13th (my birthday). The purpose of the trip was to help assess the needs, and help our partner ministries develop a long-term plan for community development in villages that had been devastated by the earthquake and tsunamis.

My first day in Medan I took part in Crisis Response and Trauma Counseling training with our Indonesian partners that have been and will continue working in Aceh province (99.9% Sunni Muslim and a province that has been in conflict with the Indonesian government since 1976). I met and interviewed several survivors of the earthquake/tsunamis from Meulaboh (the city closest to the epicenter of the quake). Their stories were heart-rending and gave reality to the trauma they experienced and the destruction I was later to witness.

Probably what impacted me most from this trip were the stories survivors shared of their ordeal. One, a 20-year-old Muslim man from Banda Aceh, told how he had just left his two-year-old daughter at home with a "caretaker" and was walking with his wife to a small business he owned when the tsunami hit. He and his wife started running, but her hand was ripped from his, and he has not seen her since. Meanwhile the wave washed him up onto the roof of the building where he sat out wave after wave. When the water started to subside, he saw a man carrying a little girl who looked like his daughter and was wearing the same clothes. He called out to them, but by the time he got down from the building they were gone, and he was now on a desperate search to find her and gave us pictures asking us to help. After seeing all the destruction there in Banda Aceh, it is hard for me to believe he will ever find her again.

I met with five different people from a congregation in Meulaboh to hear their heart-wrenching stories. Obviously the whole experience is still very real to them—a lot of tears. One of the students we had helped there shared how when the 9.0 earthquake hit she ran out of the building she'd been staying in with three children—ages 11, three-years-old, and 18-months-old—all clinging to her. She described how the road was literally flapping like a fan and with tears in her eyes shared how she was convinced this was the end of the world. Then to watch the three-story building where they usually met for worship collapse like an accordion with the owners, a Christian couple and their daughter, still inside.

She tried to gather the small congregation together for a time of worship and prayer when they heard screams and saw people running up from the beach area. They ran inside the two-story building and almost instantly water washed in all the way to the second floor. She says she has no idea how she had the strength to carry the three children up to the second floor. By the time they got there, the water was already waist high, and they were reaching outside the building to help people in who happened to wash by. Everyone was screaming and crying, and she was doing her best to calm them all down. Wave after wave kept coming. Some of the walls of the old building began to fall out. Convinced that this was also the end for her she started to sing in Indonesian and lead the others in "I Surrender All..." I did not need the translator to translate those words—the tune hit me like a ton of bricks as I realized the horror of all they were going through.

They tore a hole in the roof and managed to get on top where they were until after 4:00 that afternoon when the water finally subsided enough for them to get back down. What a testimony this young girl and the congregation there went through—crying, praying, singing. I can't help but believe God has plans for her and for that area. An estimated 70 per cent of the Meulaboh population died that December 26.

I flew up with a survey team to Banda Aceh. I was unable to see all the destruction from the air since we arrived in the middle of the night. It took us awhile to collect all the supplies we had brought, including some very colorful mats and sheets, noodles, and water.

We finally got to the "hotel" at around 2:00 a.m. and carefully crept between sleeping bodies to find a small spot on the sidewalk under the eaves to roll out our mats. We "slept" on the sidewalk since the few remaining hotels there were packed with relief agencies and media crews from around the world. What an experience! It soon became clear the place I rolled out my mat was not the best choice—right next to an open kitchen area. People were moving about and talking all night, plus the cats scavenging through the garbage not far away; and then by 5:00 a.m. the volunteer kitchen crew was up washing the concrete floor from a well in the ground.

We toured around what once was a bustling city and saw mile after mile of rubble and destruction. Everything in the tsunami's path was swept away as it proceeded 2.5 miles into town through the most crowded part of the city. Virtually nothing was left standing. Once the final count is made, probably 100,000 people (1/3 of the city's population) will have perished. It was a difficult sight to drive through the path taken by the tsunami. All along the road we could see people searching places where their relatives' houses once stood hoping to find some remains—people who were once beloved members of a family, with their remaining family members still searching for them.

After touring the devastation, our driver took us to the refugee camp where he and his relatives were staying. Marlin lost his wife and two-month-old daughter. He was saved by jumping out of a vehicle, running up a hill, and holding onto a tree as the water rose up to his neck. His mother lost her husband. His sister and her five-year-old child lost their husband and father. Each of the 21 people staying in this small tent had seen their family, homes, and livelihood stolen from them that day.

We were shaken out of our sleep at a little after five the next morning by a severe aftershock, a clear reminder of the trauma these people will continue to experience. Since we were all awake, we decided to go ahead and begin our survey down the north coast looking for areas where we could engage in long-term rebuilding of communities. Most of the relief work has been happening on the western side of Sumatra. We surveyed by car down the northeastern coast of the island, which had also seen a huge amount of death and destruction. We stopped at several camps which were still lacking in water and sanitation for the several thousand residents. I was really touched as in one village they offered us some of the only thing they had—coconuts, which they climbed the tree to get and cut open for us.

Places we surveyed will clearly need assistance for months and years ahead. Our Indonesian partners have already taken another shipment to some of the targeted areas and will take up residence there as they continue to build relationships in these communities.

This was one of the most challenging trips I have ever been on—from countless delays due to heavy air traffic in and out of the area to limited sleep, sitting in a smoke-filled airport, and losing my bag until a few hours before my return flight. Thankfully, co-workers loaned me clean shirts, and I was able to buy personal items in Medan. A hair-raising drive down the coast to Medan—no seatbelts and stomach cramps from a bug I picked up somewhere. And the long flight home with chills, aches, and fatigue, wondering what bug I got. Thankfully, it was nothing serious. Compared to what the people of Aceh lost and suffered, I have little to complain about. The people I met there were friendly and appreciative. When

I think of all they have been through, my prayer is that they will find eternal hope through the ministry we support.

INDIA

Vinnarasu Association of India (VAI)

Partners International began assisting this ministry in the aftermath of the tsunami crisis. 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 Dr. Mathias.

Among the 30 affected coastal villages in Kanyakumari District, we are involved in relief operations in the following villages: Chinnavilai, Periavilai, Mondaikadu Puthur, Kottilpadu, Colachal, Muttom, Kilmidalam, and Vaniyakudi.

Our volunteers are visiting these villages every day, meeting the affected families, organizing relief meetings and prayer cells, and distributing relief materials. We are distributing school materials and school uniforms to about 150 school children next week. In the meantime we have also identified about 20 volunteers from among the affected families and are giving them relief and rehabilitation training regularly. They will act as contact persons for future operations in the villages.