

## Post-tsunami conference

# New disaster management

The following release was issued by representatives of organizations of peasants, fisher peoples, and victims of the tsunami

We, representatives of organizations of peasants, fisher peoples, victims of the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 that wrought immense damage and loss of lives in the regions of Asia and Africa, and also non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with, and support, peasants' and fishers' organizations issue today the following important statement regarding the recent catastrophes and their effects on the affected communities:

We are extremely saddened by the fact that the twin catastrophes of the earthquake and tsunami have resulted in the loss of an unimaginable quantum of lives and property, including houses, livestock, farmlands, fish ponds, fishing gear and craft, all of which are directly related to the livelihoods and socioeconomic condition of the people of the tsunami-affected regions, most of whom are small-scale, artisanal beach-based, labour-intensive communities living in marginalized socioeconomic conditions.

In reality, most of the victims of the twin catastrophes are those who were already suffering from the ill effects of misdirected development policies long before the tsunami struck, including small-scale, artisanal fisherfolk in coastal regions, wage labourers, coastal communities without rights to land and access to coastal resources, and peasants evicted from their traditional lands.

We are shocked by how, despite the so-called great advances in science and technology, no human agency was able to either predict the catastrophes or devise an early warning system that would have mitigated the damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami. That the

catastrophes affected the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of victims in 15 countries in Asia and Africa, across a stretch of about 4,000 km of the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean, in the course of just a few hours, is another pointer to the failure of modern science and technology to serve the social needs of marginalised communities, even as it has bypassed and, in some cases, even destroyed indigenous traditional ecological knowledge systems that have been passed down from generation to generation as received wisdom, especially in coastal communities. We emphasize that in effect the tsunami has revealed that the geography of disaster is the same as the geography of economic poverty.

After the terrible destruction caused by the quake-induced tsunami, hundreds of thousands of victims have had to flee their homes, their fishing grounds and farmlands and shift to relief camps, leading to a great sense of despair and despondency in having to depend on charity and others for their living. This condition has only been worsened by the attempts of governments in some tsunami-hit countries to clear the beaches and coastal areas in the name of tsunami-preparedness, preventing coastal communities from exercising control of, and access to, traditional sources of beach-based economic activities, while simultaneously planning to hand them over to corporate and business interests in the tourism, industrial fisheries and aquaculture, and maritime industries. We take serious objection to such attempts to privatize common property resources and the collective rights of communities.

### Future prospects

The present condition and future prospects of the tsunami victims remain

uncertain as the aid landing in relief camps and tsunami-hit regions, mainly from overseas international donor agencies, has arrived uninvited and without any prior consultation whatsoever with the affected victims and intended beneficiaries.

**B**ased on field realities and reports, we are extremely worried about the accountability of the operations of aid distributors and agencies because these organizations have neither made public their statements of accounts or budgets, nor been transparent in the manner in which they have been apportioning and distributing aid.

On the other hand, some of the international and multilateral institutions, governed by a largely neoliberal perspective, have pledged aid to tsunami-hit countries in the form of loans with conditionalities attached. This tendency only exposes how the tsunami catastrophe is being exploited by such institutions to pave the way for debt dependency in the affected countries and development policies dictated by these very same institutions, and not generated by the people from the grassroots and their organizations.

Some of the emergency aid programmes meant for the tsunami victims have actually so far been benefiting transnational corporations who have

found in the tsunami catastrophe a good vehicle to sell their goods and services to the consuming public in the affected regions, using funds earmarked for tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction work. The lack of transparency and accountability in the operations of such corporations, especially in the area of food aid and the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), has only increased suspicion about the real intent of these organizations.

Based on the abovementioned issues and concerns, we, representatives of peasant and fisherfolk organizations, members of the Via Campesina, the international peasant movement, members of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), and concerned NGOs, including local and international ones, meeting in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia during 17-19 February 2005 at the "Regional Conference on Rebuilding Peasants and Fisherfolk's Livelihoods After the Earthquake and Tsunami Catastrophes" do hereby demand the following:

#### **Rehab efforts**

Rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the affected areas should be undertaken only after ensuring that the sovereignty and future livelihood prospects of the victims and their organizations are guaranteed. Since most of the victims come from the small-scale/traditional

fishing and peasant communities, such efforts should also guarantee their rights to land tenure and access to coastal resources, including the use of the shore area for beach-based livelihood activities.

**T**o ensure social justice for the tsunami victims, their rights to fertile and productive land and coastal areas must be recognized and legally guaranteed, so that they can utilise these resources productively for their food, housing and other livelihood needs in order to emerge from a life of poverty and deprivation to a superior standard of living. For this to happen, pro-people agrarian reforms in the affected regions must be implemented, and control of land and coastal resources in the post-tsunami scenario should lie with the victims and people affected by the tsunami, in particular peasants and coastal fishing communities, and not in the hands of corporate or other outside interests.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts should always uphold the principle of food sovereignty, ensuring the delivery of safe and healthy food, free of GMOs, produced locally rather than imported, and matching local cultural and social tastes and preferences.

We summarily reject "relocation" programmes meant for the tsunami victims since these are designed merely to evict the victims from their traditional lands and resources, and free them up for use by the tourism and housing/real estate and other industries, further marginalizing the affected communities, while ensuring profits for a selected few. We emphasize that the issues of safety and livelihood needs of beach-based fishing communities are organically linked.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the affected coastal areas should give utmost priority to traditional, artisanal, small-scale communities relying on beach-based fishing activities, and not to large-scale mechanized fishing vessels or industrial aquaculture farms.

We reject aid for the affected coastal fishing communities that comes in the guise of discarded fishing vessels from the developed Northern countries and

are not locally appropriate or designed to suit the needs of beach-based labour-intensive fishing practised by most coastal fishing communities in the affected regions, in contrast to the harbour-based fishing prevalent in the donor countries, supposedly designed for the safety of fishing communities. By utilising local resources and services in the reconstruction of fishing craft and gear, not only will the affected communities regain lost means of livelihood but such efforts will also spur local ancillary economic activities that will benefit the larger populations in the affected regions. The tsunami tragedy should not be used by the Northern countries to subsidize the overcapacity of their large-scale fisheries and the relocation of fishing craft to the affected regions in a kind of quick fix solution.

We reject all aid and loan programmes for tsunami victims that come with conditions attached since these are designed to engineer a dangerous debt trap, leading to another fiscal tsunami that will wipe out the future for these communities, as they continue to struggle with indebtedness.

Based on the experience of other countries in handling natural disasters, we believe there is a need for autonomous, independent disaster management and preparedness agencies, as well as early warning systems, both nationally, regionally and internationally, which, importantly, should be community-based, leading to a new form of community-based disaster management system that recognizes both political and human rights.

Finally we would like to recognize and acknowledge the support and commitment of all the people and groups that have shown great solidarity in alleviating the suffering of the victims of these twin catastrophes.

Signatories :

- Henry Saragih (Via Campesina-Indonesia)
- Thomas Kocherry (World Forum of Fisher Peoples, WFFP/National Fishworkers Forum, NFF-India)

- Adul Jiwtan (Federation of Southern Fisherfolk FSF, member of Assembly of the Poor- Thailand)
- Morawakage Anton Priyantha (National Fisheries Solidarity NAFSO- Sri Lanka)
- Yoshitaka Mashima (NOUMINREN - Japan)
- Thilak Kariyawasam (Green Movement Sri Lanka)
- Cuauhtemoc Abarca (CODE/CRT Mexico)
- Linus Jayatilake (Monlar and ANRHR Sri Lanka)
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- Ridwan Munthe (Koalisi Solidaritas Korban Bencana Alam Aceh dan Sumatera Utara/ KSKBA Indonesia)

This media release was issued on 19 February 2005 at Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia at the "Regional Conference on Rebuilding Peasants' and Fisherfolk's Livelihoods After the Earthquake and Tsunami Catastrophes"