

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Written Statement – 09 February 2005

Tsunami

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Hilary Benn): I would like to update the House on the United Kingdom's response to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami that has taken some 290,000 lives. All members of the House will wish to express once more their sincere condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives, and to all those who have suffered injury and continue to suffer in the aftermath of this disaster, both here in the UK and in the region.

On 6 and 7 January, I was in Indonesia and saw the devastation first hand. Homes, agricultural land, fishing fleets, businesses and jobs were destroyed along the coast for some 300 to 400 kilometres. Basic public services had largely collapsed. The population was deeply traumatized. The following day, I visited Batticaloa on the east coast of Sri Lanka, where I visited a school building housing over 1,000 people. Most had lost some or all of their family. Along the coastline brick buildings, two layers thick, had been flattened. I met crews from the Royal Navy ships Chatham and Diligence, who had been pumping out wells polluted by seawater, putting up tents and clearing rubble. Despite the enormity of the tragedy and the immense challenge before them, the determination shown by Government, local officials and relief organizations in both Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and the region more widely, was exceptional.

In Indonesia, the reported number of deaths, including missing, is 237,071. 617,000 people have been displaced, of whom 416,438 are located in 66 camps in Aceh province. 127,300 houses have been completely destroyed and a further 151,000 suffered over 50% damage.

Immediate relief needs are being met; but we must continue to guard against the outbreak of disease, provide shelter and ensure continued access to affected areas. The coordination and distribution of aid have steadily improved and the emphasis is now moving from the use of military to civilian capacity. Planning for recovery and reconstruction programmes has already begun.

The United Nations is assessing needs in terms of shelter and restoring people's means of earning a living. A measles vaccination campaign covering 78,000 children is underway; and an early warning health surveillance system has been established for Aceh Province, in the north-west of Sumatra. The World Health Organisation reports no serious outbreaks of disease. The United Nations are also setting up nutrition surveillance for 790,000 people requiring continuing food assistance.

In Sri Lanka, there were 30,974 reported deaths and 5,637 people are missing. 23,176 people suffered injury. 553,287 people have been displaced of whom 141,985 are in 315 camps. The relief effort is phasing down as the

focus moves to recovery programmes, although some pockets of need persist. The number of displaced camps in schools has decreased from 169 to 153.

We welcome the continuing ceasefire in Sri Lanka and hope that all parties will work together following the disaster. It would be a tribute to those who died or suffered loss if some lasting good may come of this tragedy. We welcome the Sri Lankan President's commitment to ensure that all affected areas of the country will be treated equally in the relief effort. During my visit to Sri Lanka, I met local government officials and Members of Parliament and stressed the importance of ensuring assistance gets to all those in need. DFID officials have met regularly with Sri Lankan government officials about the needs and priorities for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and continue to monitor the situation. DFID's assistance has been reaching both Tamil and Sinhalese areas in proportion to their needs. The United Nations has commented that the relief effort in Tamil areas has been impressive.

The number of dead in India is reported as 16,389. 647,599 people were displaced. On the Indian mainland, the relief effort is now complete and support to affected populations is in the recovery stage. We are assisting a number of non-governmental organisations to provide shelter and help restore people's means of earning a living.

In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, temporary shelter is being provided while permanent housing plans are worked out. There are 10,842 people in camps. Little Andaman suffered extensive damage. A non-governmental organisation Coordinating Committee has been established and aid groups are preparing support.

There were 82 deaths and 26 missing reported in the Maldives. 21,663 people were displaced. In the Maldives, recovery programmes are underway. Following an assessment, we are helping displaced people by providing equipment to help build shelter and two landing craft to speed up access to the many islands in the Archipelago. International volunteer doctors are supporting the country's health services. Vaccines have been delivered for first round of 2005 Expanded Programme of Immunisation campaigns for all children up to 2 years old. The World Food Programme indicates that 29,000 people would benefit from food assistance until employment schemes begin.

Of the other affected countries in the region, Thailand suffered 5,393 deaths and a further 3,071 are missing; Burma 61 deaths and 10 missing; and Malaysia 68 deaths and 12 missing. Burma also has 3,200 displaced people. These nations did not seek international assistance. Seychelles and Somalia were also affected. The Seychelles did not suffer many casualties but has experienced substantial damage to infrastructure and to private housing. The Government and other national agencies have taken steps to assist those who were affected and support is also being provided through the United Nations Flash Appeal. In Somalia, reports suggest that around 150 people died and 18,000 households were directly affected. Humanitarian agencies already in the country responded quickly to provide immediate assistance.

The United Nations and the Somali Emergency Disaster Response Group are leading the relief effort.

Since first news of the disaster on 26 December 2004, a massive international relief effort has been underway. I would like to pay tribute to the extraordinary generosity of the British people. The response to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal has been magnificent. The sums raised will benefit many thousands of those affected for years to come. DFID has maintained close contact with the DEC and other non-governmental organizations throughout the past six weeks and we will work with them so that the funds available are used effectively.

DFID has already allocated some £50 million of the £75 million to specific activities in support of the relief effort. On the first day, we dispatched our own assessment team to the affected area as well as providing experts for the United Nations assessment and coordination teams. The following day, we sent the first of a series of relief flights, taking tents and tarpaulins to Sri Lanka. Every day since has brought more money and help. Worldwide, the United Nations report that up to £2.14 billion has been pledged to help those in need. Its Flash appeal for \$977 million is already 93% covered. We have pledged £40 million to this Appeal.

The UK's immediate assistance helped to provide food, shelter, medical care, and water and proper sanitation, and we are now helping to establish recovery programmes. The relief phase in most places is well resourced and under control. We have supported United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international and local non-governmental organisations, and we have given direct help to address urgent needs identified by the affected governments or the United Nations. We have provided a range of logistical assets, including equipment, vehicles, airlift capacity and helicopters to help deliver assistance. This included crucial support to Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka by the British military, using naval ships and RAF aeroplanes. Full details of the support we are providing are reported on the DFID website at www.dfid.gov.uk.

The European Commission responded promptly to the Indian Ocean disaster, immediately releasing £2 million. They have now allocated over £84 million to support the relief effort. The United Kingdom's share of this commitment is over £14 million.

It is clear there has to be an Indian Ocean early warning system. On 19 January, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development attended the World Disaster Reduction Conference in Kobe, Japan, which discussed the setting up of a global warning system covering all natural hazards, and all countries by June 2007. The Association of South East Asian Nations agreed at a Ministerial meeting on 28-29 January in Thailand that the countries in the region should lead on establishing an early warning system and that the system should warn against tropical storms as well as tsunamis. The United Nations will lead on coordination and UNESCO

International Oceanographic Commission on the early warning mechanism. The European Commission has committed £1.4 million to this project.

In addition to the immediate relief, the Government will also make a significant contribution to the longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation of the regions devastated by the tsunami. We will follow the lead of the governments concerned in order to ensure that our contribution is part of a properly coordinated and effective reconstruction plan. We are therefore waiting until the governments have finalised their assessments of what will be required, which they are putting together with the support of the World Bank. Our main concern will be to ensure that assistance meets the basic needs of poor people and restores their means of earning a living. We will use our position as G8 and later as European Union President to ensure that the governments concerned have the support and funding that they need in building a better future for all those who were affected by this terrible disaster.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to all those individuals in DFID and in other Government Departments, and in the large number of UK relief agencies, for their dedication, professionalism and commitment in responding to this terrible tragedy.