

Oxfam letter to governments on post-tsunami relief and reconstruction

Sent to governments attending the Jakarta Tsunami Summit, 6 January 2005

4 January 2005

I write to you urgently ahead of the meeting in Jakarta on 6 January to plan the relief and reconstruction for the 6 million people directly affected by last week's catastrophic tsunami.

With its partners in most of the affected countries, Oxfam International is working to bring aid to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable victims.

I hope you will allow me to highlight six points from the experience that we have already gained from our response to this terrible crisis.

1. Humanitarian aid: Governments should immediately pledge to fully fund the new appeal that the UN Secretary General is due to announce on 6 January. Every single pledge must be turned into real aid, delivered to people on the ground as fast as possible. This will require donor governments to contribute their funds to the UN effort far faster than has happened in some previous crises.

2. Humanitarian coordination: The UN agencies should work as one team, led by Jan Egeland, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the UN national coordinators. They should be responsible for identifying the appropriate geographical area and sector for the operations of every other international agency. This immense humanitarian effort will require increased support by many others, including the use of foreign military resources. Such military support should be temporary – to meet the extraordinary needs – and should be subject to the overall civilian leadership. The humanitarian aid must be distributed on the basis of impartial assessments and according to the fundamental principles of humanity and impartiality.

3. 'Reconstruction plus': Affected governments and donors should commit themselves now to devising and implementing a plan for 'reconstruction plus': aiming to reduce poverty and ensure environmental sustainability in the blighted regions. They should commit themselves to support such a plan in the long term (for no less than five years), as part of the affected countries' plans to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Donor governments should provide grants, not loans, focused on reducing poverty as well as rebuilding the devastated physical infrastructure. Aid should not be 'tied' with the aim of benefiting commercial companies in donor countries.

4. Debt: The same aim – to reduce poverty – must apply also to debt relief. Relief must be strictly ring-fenced, to reduce poverty and rebuild affected communities. There should be an immediate moratorium on all bilateral and multilateral debt repayments from the worst-affected countries. A Task Force should be immediately set up – including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Asian Development Bank – to report to an extraordinary meeting of the Paris Club of creditors by the end of January. The members must agree on a comprehensive debt-linked response to the disaster, where necessary including debt cancellation, which should be made conditional upon plans to use the funds thus released for the reduction of poverty. Such a response to the tsunami will not reduce the vital need for the G7 to cancel 100 per cent of the money owed by highly indebted poor countries early this year.

5. Trade: The reconstruction of Sri Lanka and the Maldives at least may be hampered by their unfair terms of trade with the USA and EU. Their clothing exports, which account for half of Sri Lanka's export earnings, are threatened by the phasing

out of quotas under the Multi Fibre Agreement, and by the imposition of high tariffs and restrictive rules of origin in the USA and EU. Unilateral and permanent measures by the USA and EU to make their markets more accessible to these clothing exports would demonstrate a coherent response to the tsunami disaster.

6. The rest of the world: It would be a terrible irony if international compassion for the victims of the tsunami diverted aid from the many millions of people suffering in other crises – from Darfur in Sudan, to Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – or from the tens of thousands of people who die each day as a result of poverty. Since more money has already been pledged for this crisis than for all the other disasters of 2004, donor governments should make a 'double humanitarian pledge' on 6 January:

- to fully fund the UN Secretary General's appeal for the victims of the tsunami, and
- to fully fund the UN's 2005 Consolidated Appeals for other crises, launched by the Secretary General in November 2004 and still sorely underfunded.

The devastation caused by the tsunami has been so great partly because so many poor people are so vulnerable to natural disasters. This reinforces the message of Make Poverty History that 2005, beginning with this tragedy, must be the year when rich governments make a commitment to double their levels of aid by 2013. Every rich country should provide 0.7 per cent of its gross national product in aid – and cancel poor countries' debts.

We do hope that the conference will set out a clear plan for the future of development assistance in the wake of the devastation in Asia, and we look forward to communicating with you and your office on these issues over the coming weeks.

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