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One Year After the Tsunami: Policy and Public Perceptions

EDITED BY MICHAEL KUGELMAN

ABSTRACT This Special Report assesses post-disaster reconstruction efforts in Indonesia—and Indonesian views of them—one year after the great Asian tsunami. **Bambang Harymurti** provides an overview of Indonesia's post-tsunami environment—one of high expectations and growing optimism about the rebuilding process, yet one also marked by Aceh's fragile politics and Indonesia's legacy of corruption. **Muhammad Qodari** surveys Indonesian media and public opinion in his study of how U.S. post-tsunami aid has boosted the American image in Indonesia. **Roberta Cohen** examines treatment of the tsunami's displaced, employing as a normative tool the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Finally, **Courtland Robinson** analyzes the steps taken to facilitate IDPs' permanent return, as well as the many remaining challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL KUGELMAN

More than a year after the great Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004, the numbers still astonish: approximately 200,000 dead; hundreds of thousands of gutted homes; and more than one million people displaced. What befell the Indian Ocean region on that fateful day was truly a natural disaster of extraordinary magnitude.

The tsunami affected 12 different nations, from Tanzania to Malaysia. Yet no nation was ravaged more than Indonesia. According to Indonesian government figures, the disaster's toll in Aceh Province and Nias (an island comprising part of North Sumatra Province) included 167,000 human deaths; 500,000 people displaced; 3,000 kilometers of useless roads; and more than 2,000 damaged school buildings.¹ Other sources' figures are more conservative, with estimates of around 130,000 deaths in

Indonesia.² Regardless of the exact numbers of casualties, the tsunami's destructive force was catastrophic. One post-tsunami report estimated Aceh Province's total damage and losses at \$4.5 billion, "almost equal to its entire GDP."³

The dramatic international response, which began with unprecedented levels of relief aid and donations during the rescue phase, has remained intense as post-disaster efforts have shifted to reconstruction. Ninety-two countries have contributed over the last year, and more than \$13 billion has been raised altogether. Seven nations, as well as the Asian Development Bank, European Commission, and World Bank, have pledged at least \$300 million. And in an indication of the world's continued generosity in the year after the tsunami, 84 percent of the financial needs for the United Nations tsunami appeal had been fulfilled as of early December 2005 (conversely, all other UN appeals for humanitarian aid in 2005 had received an average of 52 percent of needed funds by that date).⁴

This edited report, the outgrowth of a January 2006 Wilson Center event (hosted by the Asia Program with assistance from the GE Foundation), assesses post-tsunami reconstruction efforts in Indonesia—and Indonesian views of them—one year later. In the first essay, **Bambang Harymurti**, editor-in-chief of the Indonesian weekly newsmagazine *TEMPO*, describes the sustained international campaign of post-tsunami giving as “heartwarming.” Yet this outpouring of aid puts pressure on Aceh’s reconstruction. For if the rebuilding process founders in Aceh, site of the brunt of the tsunami’s destruction, then, he asserts, the donor community’s magnanimity may succumb to cynicism, jeopardizing the prospect of aid during future post-disaster periods.

Harymurti lists several potential obstacles to a successful reconstruction. Among them is Aceh’s political situation. The goodwill that arose in the tsunami’s aftermath is often cited as a spur to the historic August 2005 peace agreement between Indonesia’s government and the Free Aceh Movement, or GAM. However, Harymurti warns of the challenges of assimilating the recently disarmed former combatants into Acehese society. Another obstacle is corruption. The Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), the civilian agency charged with coordinating Indonesia’s reconstruction, is regarded as clean and efficient, but Harymurti notes that Transparency International consistently ranks Indonesia among the world’s most corrupt nations. The BRR itself, he adds, has been accused by one Indonesian NGO of price mark-ups.

These challenges notwithstanding, Harymurti asserts that the Indonesian public has grown increasingly favorable toward the rebuilding effort. He cites public opinion data demonstrating rising optimism about Indonesian government reconstruction efforts between June and December 2005. However, Harymurti expects the numbers may increase further as the BRR deepens its involvement in reconstruction.

Have Indonesian perceptions of the United States improved as well after the tsunami? **Muhammad Qodari**, executive deputy director of the Indonesian polling firm Indonesian Survey Circle, addresses this question in the second essay. A notable fact of the post-tsunami response has been the high level of U.S. involvement. American forces were on the front lines of the initial wave of relief efforts. Qodari notes that tens of thousands of U.S. military personnel as well as dozens of ships and aircraft deployed to the disaster zones. And one local observer has recounted how American Marines rapidly recovered bodies from river beds, ensuring proper Islamic burials for Aceh victims.⁵ The U.S. government has also pledged \$857 million in aid, more than any other nation. Additionally, American private donations total \$1.48 billion, an amount that dwarfs private funding from other top contributing nations.⁶

How has all this affected Indonesian views of the United States? Relatively positively, according to Qodari. A November 2004 poll found that 66 percent of Indonesians harbored an “unfavorable opinion” of the United States. However, this figure decreased to 54 percent in a separate poll conducted in February 2005, using field data from the Indonesian Survey Institute.⁷ This February 2005 poll also asked Indonesians how much more or less favorable an opinion they held toward the United States, knowing Americans were providing assistance to Indonesian tsunami victims. Qodari reports that 65 percent of respondents answered either “much more favorable” or “somewhat more favorable.” Only 5 percent said “much less favorable.” More complimentary views of the United States among Indonesians have been sustained in public opinion into this year. The nonprofit group Terror Free Tomorrow, using field data obtained by the Indonesian Survey Institute in late January 2006, concludes that 63 percent of Indonesians have more favorable views of the United States because of its provision of tsunami aid.⁸

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ASIA PROGRAM STAFF

Robert M. Hathaway, Program Director
Mark Mohr, Program Associate
Bhumika Muchhala, Program Associate
Michael Kugelman, Program Assistant

Qodari's data are notable in that they depict a rising American image in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, at a time of often turbulent relations between Muslims and the West.

Harymurti and Qodari judge that Indonesian public perceptions of post-tsunami reconstruction efforts are relatively favorable. Yet what have been the actual results on the ground? In the third essay, the Brookings Institution's **Roberta Cohen** evaluates how well Indonesia's government and the international community have helped Indonesians displaced by the tsunami. She uses as an analytical framework the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), a series of rights (and government obligations) that apply to people uprooted by conflict or natural disaster within national borders. The Guiding Principles were developed by the UN Commission on Human Rights in the 1990s and underpinned by resolutions of this Commission and by the UN General Assembly. Cohen argues that these principles, though nonbinding, have attained a high normative value and constitute a useful means of gauging the status of IDPs.

Cohen's assessment reveals that Indonesia's government has upheld certain obligations while also often neglecting to protect IDPs' rights. For instance, one principle obliges governments to take preventative measures against future displacement—and an Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system will indeed soon become operational. Similarly, the Guiding Principles underscore the importance of civilian-led reconstruction and consultation with the affected—and the agency created to oversee reconstruction is in fact unabashedly civilian and uses what Cohen labels a “participatory” approach. However, the Guiding Principles also stress attention to vulnerable groups and protection of property rights—and Cohen asserts the reconstruction efforts often marginalize women and offer insufficient property rights protections.

Cohen's commentary gives credence to Harymurti's observation that Aceh's political situation has a strong bearing on reconstruction. Access to reconstruction assistance is a fundamental right for IDPs, argues Cohen. However, Aceh's legacy of political strife had long kept international aid groups out of much of the region. Therefore, during the first few months after the tsunami, these groups, owing to their unfamiliarity with the region, struggled to reach those in hard-hit areas. Additionally, notes Cohen, discrimination must never be used in determining how aid is

provided to IDPs. Yet she cites reports of general disparities in assistance to those uprooted by the political conflict and those displaced by the tsunami. However, after the August 2005 peace plan was signed, the Indonesian government began pledging equal treatment to both groups of IDPs. Still, Cohen writes, the issue of disparity lingers, as certain NGOs earmark their funding exclusively for tsunami victims.

While Cohen analyzes the extent to which Indonesia's government has safeguarded the rights of IDPs, **Courtland Robinson** examines in the final essay the steps taken to facilitate IDPs' permanent return. Robinson, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, concludes that progress is being made with improving conditions in temporary living centers (TLCs) and with constructing new permanent homes, though the rebuilding of old homes has occurred at a slower pace. By the end of 2005, according to his data, more than 16,000 new homes had been built with more than 13,000 still in construction (the BRR's goal was to build 30,000 homes in 2005). In 2006, the BRR aims for upgrades—both for TLCs as well as for the homes of “host families” housing the tsunami's displaced. The BRR projects 75,000 new homes in 2006, with all housing construction to be complete by mid-2007.

Beyond these encouraging figures, however, lie what Robinson refers to as “formidable” challenges. Some of these, such as clearing millions of tons of debris from land and rebuilding water, sewage, and electricity facilities, must be addressed before sustainable communities can flourish. Robinson worries as well that as reconstruction moves away from areas easily accessible by road and burrows into the more isolated swaths of Aceh, “forward progress” could grow more difficult. Finally, he notes the even greater challenge of accommodating the tens of thousands of families that do not have the option of permanent return, because their former homes are located in land no longer fit for living.

Robinson cites a survey that underscores the urgency in surmounting these challenges. A September 2005 Johns Hopkins/Mercy Corps poll of more than 600 households, drawn randomly from 70 Aceh villages, concluded that although 70 percent of the polled households were displaced, 90 percent of these displaced households still sought return. These results, notes Robinson, indicate that “neither the terrors of the tsunami nor the trials of prolonged displacement” has “shaken the resolve” to return.

Several salient themes emerge from these essays. A major one is how intertwined Aceh's politics are with the progress of tsunami reconstruction. Once this linkage is understood, it is easy to imagine what inspired the Indonesian government and its GAM counterparts to declare in the August 2005 peace accord that "only the peaceful settlement of the conflict" will allow Aceh's post-tsunami rebuilding process "to progress and succeed."

Another theme here—a more hopeful one—is how the sheer magnitude of the tsunami nonetheless provides positive opportunities. According to Qodari, the disaster has provided the United States with an opportunity to improve its image in the Muslim world. And for Cohen, the post-tsunami moment is ripe for reversing Aceh's legacy of discrimination and conflict. Better human rights monitoring of IDPs, she believes, will foster a more lasting reconstruction. She recommends strengthening the capacities of Komnas Ham, Indonesia's national human rights commission, which will be training Indonesian law enforcement on how to protect IDP rights.

The tsunami has also created opportunities for new and better standards of both Indonesian and global governance. Contending that corruption in Indonesia is systemic, and not rooted in individual acts, Harymurti envisions the institution of the BRR (which has a very strict employee code of conduct) as emblematic of an entirely new paradigm for corruption-free bureaucracy in Indonesia. Robinson, meanwhile, discerns in the BRR's philosophy of "community-driven" development in reconstruction a participatory, people-oriented model for improving human lives. He argues that this philosophy should be emulated by nongovernmental and international organizations and by the donor community as a whole. At a time when responses to recent disasters such as the October 2005 Kashmir earthquake and Hurricane Katrina are often criticized, these words may hold some resonance.

ENDNOTES

1. BRR and International Partners, "Aceh and Nias One Year After the Tsunami: the Recovery Effort and Way Forward" (Joint Report of the BRR and International Partners, December 2005), 16. Available from <http://www.e-aceh-nias.org/oneyear/FullReportEng.pdf>.

2. See BBC, "At A Glance: Countries Hit," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4126019.stm>, and United Nations, "Tsunami Recovery: Taking Stock after 12 Months" (New York: United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, December 22, 2005), 4. Available from http://www.tsunamispecialenvoy.org/pdf/OSE_anniversary.pdf.
3. UN, "Tsunami Recovery: Taking Stock after 12 Months," 4.
4. Karl F. Inderfurth, David Fabrycky, and Stephen P. Cohen, "The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: One Year Report," *The Sigur Center Asia Papers* (Washington, D.C.: The Sigur Center for Asian Studies, George Washington University, December 2005), 11. Available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~sigur/pubs/SCAP25-Tsunami2.pdf>.
5. Sandra Hamid, speaker at conference, "Reconciliation & Reconstruction: Building Peace and Prosperity After the Tsunami," The Asia Foundation, Washington, D.C., November 15, 2005.
6. Inderfurth, Fabrycky, and Cohen, 9.
7. Qodari's organization, the Indonesian Survey Circle (Lingharan Survei Indonesia), should not be confused with the Indonesian Survey Institute (Lembaga Survei Indonesia), which is also mentioned in these pages. While both polling firms have the same acronym (LSI), they are two different organizations. To avoid confusion, they are both referred to by their full names in this Special Report.
8. Terror Free Tomorrow, "One Year Later: Humanitarian Relief Sustains Change in Muslim Public Opinion: Results From a New Poll in Indonesia" (Washington, D.C.: Terror Free for Tomorrow, 2006), 2. Report available from <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimages/INDONESIA%202006%20Poll%20Report.pdf>.
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THE HIGH STAKES OF ACEH'S POST-TSUNAMI RECONSTRUCTION

BAMBANG HARYMURTI

It was a sunny day on December 26, 2005. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The Indonesian leader was giving a very eloquent speech, broadcast all over the world, about the tsunami that hit Aceh exactly a year before, the most devastating natural disaster in modern history that caused 167,000 people to be dead or missing and that swept away almost all of the buildings along an 800 kilometer strip of coastline. More than half a million people were displaced from their homes and later had to live in refugee camps.¹

Global media coverage of this horrific human tragedy was intense. Featured in the daily news for months, it triggered an unprecedented international response. People from all over the world donated and almost all governments sent rescue teams. Now, more than 120 international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and four times as many local NGOs are involved in rebuilding Aceh and Nias. The World Bank estimates that around U.S.\$9 billion is available for this noble effort. One third of this aid has come from global civil societies, another third from international donors, and the rest from the Indonesian government.

This tsunami of global goodwill is a truly heartwarming phenomenon, but, on the other hand, it also creates a huge potential risk. As noted by many world leaders, including World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz and former U.S. president Bill Clinton (now the United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery), the global solidarity triggered by the tsunami must be followed by a successful Aceh rebuilding effort in order to sustain the high level of international generosity toward major disaster reconstruction. Failure to accomplish this humanitarian mission, especially if the failure is due to corruption and bureaucratic incompetence, could produce global cynicism and cause future donations for post-disaster relief operations to dry up.

RIISING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS

In this context, the fact that about 60,000 Acehnese still live in tents a year after the tsunami swept their homes away is clearly alarming. It is also quite ironic that when President Yudhoyono made his speech from an elaborate podium at the north side of

Baiturrahkham Grand Mosque, there were still quite a few inhabited makeshift houses, made from tsunami debris, located less than a hundred meters away. It is a grim reminder that all is not well. Money in this case is perhaps not a problem, but clearly the capacity to rebuild Aceh is far from sufficient in meeting public expectations.

To be fair, this is not a unique problem. While the American public perhaps only began to grasp the complexities and difficulties of rebuilding a city after New Orleans was hit by Hurricane Katrina, other nations have previously experienced the frustrations arising from an overly optimistic public. At any rate, despite Acehnese frustration that reconstruction is too slow, a joint report of Indonesia's post-tsunami reconstruction agency and international partners—including the World Bank—considers that Aceh's rebuilding process is progressing at least as quickly as rebuilding efforts following disasters in Japan (Kobe's 1995 earthquake); Turkey (the 1992 earthquake); Honduras (Hurricane Mitch in 1998); Iran (the Bam earthquake of 2003); Venezuela (the flood of 1999); and even the United States (Hurricane Ivan in 2004).² Yet it must be noted that the World Bank is clearly not an independent observer, because it plays a major role in the Aceh rebuilding and rehabilitation effort.

The Indonesian public, as shown by recent public opinion polls conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute, is more skeptical. In June of last year, only 34 percent of Indonesians sampled in 32 provinces were satisfied with the central government's efforts in Aceh; the provincial government did even worse (27 percent). Indonesian NGOs fared better than the government (53 percent), but not as well as international NGOs (64 percent) or foreign governments (68 percent).³

The figures changed when a second survey was conducted six months later in December 2005. Public satisfaction levels toward the central government's efforts improved slightly to 35 percent, as did those toward the provincial government (32 percent). On the other hand, NGOs and foreign governments suffered a downturn in the public's eyes. Satisfaction levels toward domestic NGOs decreased to 50 percent, while satisfactory views toward international NGOs and foreign governments dropped to 56 and 65 percent, respectively.

Bambang Harymurti is editor-in-chief of Indonesia's *TEMPO* weekly newsmagazine.

These changes in public perceptions can be attributed to the different stages of the rebuilding effort in Aceh. Foreign governments and NGOs played prominent roles during the rescue effort in the first three months after the tsunami as they were much better equipped and financed, and they could operate almost independently of local government bureaucracy. After that, when the rehabilitation and reconstruction stages started to be implemented, the role of the central and local governments began to increase—especially after the official creation in April 2005 of the Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi Aceh dan Nias).

This new agency, which is known locally by its acronym BRR, has been heavily criticized for its “slowness.” The head of the BRR, Dr. Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, a former minister who holds a doctorate in management and has a squeaky-clean reputation, is very much aware of this problem. However, he has decided to emphasize better planning, a more bottom-up approach, and good governance over speediness. His team consists mostly of young professionals with high integrity. His preference for integrity is much more dominant than field experience. The result so far has been a very steep learning curve, which started at a very low level.

In June 2005, about 60 percent of Indonesians and 24 percent of Acehnese believed that the central government’s effort in rebuilding Aceh was improving. Six months later the number increased to 74 percent nationwide and 27 percent in Aceh. It is estimated that the number will increase again this year as the BRR becomes better organized and more in control. In 2005, about U.S.\$2 billion was spent in Aceh and Nias, and this year as much as U.S.\$3 billion will be spent on reconstruction. Last year the BRR failed to reach its target of building 30,000 houses, although not by much. Difficulties in reorganizing land titles (as most documents for about 600,000 land titles registered before the tsunami were swept away) and transportation (due to lack of usable roads) are two main obstacles. Many parts of the Aceh Jaya regency, such as the city of Calang, are still isolated. So are many areas in the Singkil regency, which was hit by an earthquake measuring 8.2 on the Richter scale just three months after it was devastated by the tsunami.

However, as more and more land is re-registered and more roads are built this year (including a U.S. plan to build a 245 kilometer road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh), the increase in the capacity to build houses is expected to be quite steep. Hence the BRR’s optimism that about 148,000 of them will be built by the end of 2007.

Part of this optimism is based on the fact that the ideological battles in rebuilding Aceh have been settled. Proponents of a centrally based, industrial approach to reconstructing Aceh have been soundly defeated within the BRR, while proponents of a community-driven approach are now well-entrenched. Although this approach started very slowly, it has gained momentum with time. As trust in the BRR is slowly but surely increasing among Acehnese, so is their optimism.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO PROGRESS

Time will tell whether this optimism is excessive. There are many factors that can influence the progress in Aceh. One of the most important is the political and security situation. So far, since the Aceh peace agreement was signed in Helsinki, Finland, on August 15 of last year, the situation has been very encouraging. Disarmament of the military wing of the rebel group Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), or Free Aceh Movement, was conducted successfully, as was its transformation into a political institution. The drafting of a special law on Aceh, which is part of the Aceh peace agreement, has been finalized at the local level. Although some opposition has been mounted in the national parliament, most political observers expect the law to be passed by Indonesia’s national parliament this year.

The next obstacle will be the local election in Aceh, based on this new special law and designed to include former rebels as candidates. It would be overly optimistic to expect that the election will be conducted without any glitches. The major concern is whether both sides can contain their differences within a political framework or not. Barring any major changes in national politics or GAM’s internal condition (GAM leader Hasan Tiro is more than 80 years old and not in good health), it is reasonable to expect that, though major armed conflict will not flare up again, some local incidents are probably unavoidable. One of the trickiest problems, which must be resolved in order to sustain peace, is how to absorb and reintegrate former combatants successfully into civil society.

Another source of potential political conflict lies between the elite in Banda Aceh and local elite outside Banda Aceh, especially in the east. Aceh Province consists of at least seven ethnic groups with distinct cultures and languages. While Acehnese in Banda Aceh complain about the overly dominant role of Jakarta in their everyday life, many rural Acehnese outside Banda Aceh are resentful of Banda Aceh’s domination. Recently, for instance, 11 regents in eastern Aceh declared their intention to form a separate province.

Another factor to be watched is the capacity of the

BRR and local government in providing good governance. Indonesia is notorious for being one of the most corrupt countries in the world. For many years, ever since Transparency International conducted its annual survey of the Corruption Perception Index, Indonesia has fared very poorly. Although it is no longer considered to be among the five worst countries, it still remains among the bottom ten. President Yudhoyono was elected mainly by riding on the public's anticorruption groundswell. Since he was elected to head the government in October 2004, he has mainly kept his campaign promise to eradicate corruption in the country, although some critics believe his efforts have not been carried out quickly enough.

In Aceh, the BRR so far has been able to retain its image as a clean institution. However, most local governments in Aceh are still considered prone to corruption. Last year, for instance, the BRR received 206 reports of possible corrupt activities by local governments that the BRR's anticorruption unit is investigating.⁴ The director of this unit is an Australian consultant who has worked in Indonesia for the past 15 years on good governance issues. This unit has been credited for keeping Aceh away from corrupt activities, and even criticized for being too rigid and causing delays in many project implementations.

One of the most difficult corrupt practices that has to be eliminated is the collusion among tender participants in marking up the price offered and then distributing the profit to all participants. The BRR has been given special powers to cancel tenders that it believes have been conducted in corrupt ways. Ironically, the BRR itself has been accused by Indonesia Corruption Watch, an Indonesian NGO, of becoming involved in the practice of marking up prices. The group estimates the market price of building houses in Aceh should have been 32 percent lower than the estimates provided by the BRR.

Is the BRR corrupt? Most people who know Kuntoro Mangkusubroto believe this accusation has no merit, but they will agree that the BRR is still too slow. The challenge is how to increase its speed without jeopardizing its integrity.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BRR

Much is at stake in the success or failure of the BRR in Aceh. The agency, as seen by many reformist eyes in Indonesia, represents a new standard for how the future Indonesian bureaucracy should be modeled. The official salaries of the BRR's employees are very high, by Indonesian bureaucracy standards, but employees also have to abide by a code of conduct which is very strictly enforced.

This condition has made the BRR a unique government institution in Indonesia. In general, state employees receive meager official remunerations that must be supplemented by a complicated honorarium system that works rather similarly to a multilevel marketing mechanism. This system gives administrators the power of the carrot over their subordinates in a system that gives supervisors almost no stick to wield over their underlings. However, the unintended result of this mechanism is that it is much skewed to favor people in high places who actually do less work than their unfortunate lower rank colleagues.

This condition forces junior staff *en masse* to look for extra income in order to make ends meet. A large proportion of them end up being involved in questionable practices, which then become hard habits to shake as they move upward on their career ladders. Hence, corruption in the Indonesian bureaucracy is a systemic problem, and not merely attributable to individual aberrations. Therefore, effective anticorruption efforts can only be conducted through a major reform of the organization of Indonesia's bureaucracy.

In this context, a successful BRR can be seen as the model for how the new national bureaucracy should be organized. It is the wish of this author that such an achievement will be attained, and that the benefit of the success of the Aceh reconstruction is not limited only to the tsunami-affected areas but to the whole population of Indonesia. If this wish becomes a reality, we can be assured that the global goodwill triggered by the Aceh tsunami will remain alive and well for the foreseeable future.

ENDNOTES

1. Many of the figures provided in this essay are drawn from *The Tsunami, 1 Year On*, a special edition of *TEMPO* Magazine (December 27, 2005–January 2, 2006).
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THE TSUNAMI, HUMANITARIAN AID, AND THE IMAGE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

MUHAMMAD QODARI

This essay examines how American humanitarian aid following the December 2004 Asian tsunami has affected the U.S. image in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. In particular, the essay addresses how the disaster has impacted images of the United States in the Indonesian media and in Indonesian public opinion. Seen more broadly, the essay discusses what America has done and can do to improve its image in the Muslim world, using U.S. post-tsunami humanitarian aid as a case study.

MIXED FEELINGS TOWARD THE UNITED STATES

Contrary to the perception that the U.S. image is wholly negative among people in Muslim countries, findings from recent focus group research in Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia reveal that Muslims do not harbor an unequivocal hatred toward the United States. While they do hate America, they love it too. They are angered by a U.S. foreign policy perceived as hostile to Islam, yet they admire the American economy, technology, education, and work ethic.¹

This same research concludes that public perceptions of the United States were more positive in the past. U.S. popular culture and American technology contributed to “often warm” views of the United States held earlier. “Before, people did not hate America,” noted one focus group member from Morocco. “America was the country of freedom, development, and technology.” And an Indonesian woman acknowledged that “previously the image of the US was good, but since Bush took office and declared war, we see it as arrogant and we hate it.”² Indeed, it is largely the emergence of recent developments in U.S. foreign policy that has worsened the image of the United States. The military action in Iraq has sparked fear and anger. The war against terrorism is perceived as having an anti-Muslim bias. And there is also a long-held perception that the

U.S. government always takes the side of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because America's government and society are heavily influenced by the American Jewish community.

However, the fact that perceptions of the United States were better previously implies that the currently tarnished image of America among Muslim countries is repairable. The Muslims in the countries cited above do not hate America for what America is. They are now disillusioned with Uncle Sam because of what Uncle Sam does. America can reverse this negative image by adopting policies that would create sympathy among people in Muslim countries and by avoiding actions that cause Muslims' disappointment.

LESSONS FROM ACEH: THE MEDIA

In response to the tsunami, the U.S. government immediately deployed 16,000 military personnel, 26 ships, 58 helicopters, and 43 fixed-wing aircraft to help the victims across the Indian Ocean region.³ The U.S. government also pledged U.S.\$350 million for the post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction process. Later, it increased its commitment to U.S.\$950 million. By early March 2005, donations from the American people and other sources of private funding nearly reached U.S.\$1 billion. These aid figures, according to one official of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), represent the largest American humanitarian pledge ever recorded in American history.⁴

Indonesian media have given substantial coverage of American troops in action. One of the most-remembered images was a picture of an American marine carrying an elderly tsunami victim in his arms. The photograph appeared on the front page of *Jawa Post*, one of the biggest and most widely circulated dailies in Indonesia. The picture was very touching and represented a positive image of American troops as heroes to the tsunami victims of Aceh. Similarly, pictures often appeared in the media of American soldiers delivering aid. There were also

Muhammad Qodari is deputy executive director of the Indonesian Survey Circle (Lingkaran Survei Indonesia), a polling firm based in Jakarta.

excellent reports from television and print media of a visit to a U.S. medical ship. The reports included details of the ship and its crew, medical facilities available on board, the number of tsunami victims helped, as well as the cost of running the ship. Finally, there were articles highlighting the tsunami aid donations of the American government and people.

However, not all media footage formed a positive image of the U.S. aid. One image showed American troops throwing food abruptly from a low-flying helicopter as tsunami victims scrambled to reach the food. Though the situation was dire and an emergency, it is notable how the footage depicted a negative image of U.S. aid because of the undignified way in which the aid was delivered.

There were also examples of media coverage that gave space to those not supportive of U.S. actions in Aceh. Soon after the tsunami, former Indonesian military generals issued statements questioning Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's policy to allow foreign troops to enter Aceh. These generals were suspicious that foreign troops would provide secret military assistance to rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). However, President Yudhoyono used the media to dismiss this suspicion, announcing that the foreign military presence would serve only a humanitarian purpose. And one Indonesian military commander argued that the suffering of the Acehnese was more urgent than the fear of foreign military intervention.

LESSONS FROM ACEH: PUBLIC OPINION

Nonetheless, overall the U.S. humanitarian aid provided to the tsunami victims has helped improve the image of America in the eyes of the Indonesian public. This improvement can be illustrated by the decrease in Indonesian unfavorable views of the United States. In a survey conducted in early November 2004,⁵ when respondents were asked whether they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the United States, around 66 percent said unfavorable. But when asked the same question in another survey just three months later, in February 2005, in the aftermath of the tsunami and following extensive U.S. aid in Aceh, the percentage of Indonesians holding an unfavorable opinion of America had decreased significantly to almost 54 percent.⁶

The effect of the tsunami aid can also be discerned through another of the survey questions of February

2005: "The United States is providing aid to help Aceh and North Sumatra tsunami victims. Please tell me if this makes your opinion of the U.S. much more favorable, somewhat more favorable, somewhat less favorable, or much less favorable?" The answers were as follows: much more favorable (17.4 percent), somewhat more favorable (47.6 percent), somewhat less favorable (12.7 percent), or much less favorable (5 percent), and don't know/no answer (17.3 percent). Apparently, 65 percent of the polled Indonesians had a more favorable image of the U.S. after the Americans' provision of humanitarian aid.

These rising views of the United States are reflected in public comments made by Indonesians since the tsunami. Immediately after the disaster, Indonesians expressed gratitude to the United States. One person said, "I really, really appreciate the U.S. coming. We look in the sky and see only U.S. planes."⁷ Only days after the tsunami, a professor at the State Institute of Islamic Studies in Medan concluded that some of the university's "quite aggressive" students have grown "more moderate" following U.S. relief efforts.⁸ One month after the tsunami, a woman reasoned, "As an Indonesian, I really appreciated their help. Let us think positively, they helped us after they saw the suffering of the people in Aceh."⁹ And more than one year after the tsunami, the Indonesian legislator Djoko Susilo contended that "military aid [after the tsunami], humanitarian help, and private philanthropy . . . boosted the image of the U.S."¹⁰

The proof that humanitarian aid fulfills a public diplomacy role in addition to serving its main purpose of assisting victims of natural disaster is also found in Pakistan. In the response to the earthquake that struck Pakistan on October 8, 2005, the U.S. government launched an initial humanitarian aid effort worth U.S.\$50 million.¹¹ A survey conducted at the end of November 2005 in Pakistan shows a public opinion pattern similar to that of Indonesia. U.S. favorability among Pakistanis doubled from 23 percent in May to more than 46 percent, while the percentage of Pakistanis with very unfavorable views declined from 48 percent to 28 percent. According to the group that commissioned the poll, these findings are fundamental because for the first time since the September 11, 2001, attacks, evidence has indicated that, at least in the case of this survey, more Pakistanis are now favorable to the United States than unfavorable.¹²

The positive effect of humanitarian aid seems to have been realized by the U.S. government. “I think the world is beginning to see a different impression of America,” President George W. Bush told the press on March 8, 2005, reacting to a report from former U.S. presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton on their efforts to raise private contributions for the humanitarian campaign in Aceh, as well as to the polling in Indonesia cited above. “I’m heartened that the good folks of Indonesia, for example, see a different America now when they think about our country,” he said. Former president Bush has attributed the change reflected in the polls to Indonesians’ response to “the kindness, [and the] outpouring of support for the tsunami victims.”¹³

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

The tsunami of December 26, 2004, that killed 225,000 people has been referred to by many names, all of which associate with “disaster.” But one year after the tsunami, we can say that it has also opened the window of “opportunity.” For example, the opportunity for the international community to show its global solidarity toward the suffering of the tsunami victims. And the opportunity for the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement to meet and solve once and for all the 30-year-old armed conflict that has afflicted the lives of the Acehnese. Finally, the tsunami disaster shows the U.S. government that there are opportunities and ways to improve its image among Muslim countries—ways that do not involve military action that have in fact worsened the image of America. In fact, there are other nonmilitary means the United States can use to improve its image—for example, aid or development cooperation in the education and health arenas. By adopting such policies, perhaps positive perceptions of the United States can continue to be sustained in the months ahead.

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MEASURING INDONESIA'S RESPONSE TO THE TSUNAMI

ROBERTA COHEN

Never before has a response to a natural disaster occasioned so much scrutiny internationally as has the December 2005 tsunami. One reason was its regional impact and the enormous devastation left in its wake. Another was the unprecedented amount of money raised by the international community in the disaster's aftermath and the need for oversight in the wake of the United Nations oil-for-food scandal.

Overall, the UN got high marks for its response to the tsunami. It acted immediately, raising international awareness to the disaster, mobilizing funds—75 percent of which have been received—and playing a notable role in coordinating one of the largest relief operations in history. Indeed, UN officials often point out that as a result of its efforts, epidemics were averted, food assistance was delivered, most children are now back in school, and tens of thousands are employed and earning money again.

The United States has also come in for praise. Its military was quick to undertake rescue and relief operations, and it was among the world's top contributors (the government pledged more than \$800 million, and the U.S. private sector donated about \$1.5 billion). Indeed, polls have found a more favorable view of the United States because of its response to the tsunami.¹

But something is missing from this picture. First, the response to the emergency phase of the disaster must not be confused with the response to the reconstruction phase. It could take five to ten years to succeed at recovery, with sustained attention and staying power needed. Second, a close look must be given at the extent to which the survivors have actually benefited. Eighty percent of the survivors are still living in temporary shelters, many of which are substandard.² In Aceh, out of some 500,000 left homeless, at least 200,000 are still living with friends and relatives, 60,000 to 70,000 are in barracks, and 67,000 in tents.³ Many are without access to clean water, sanitation, and health care, while large numbers have no jobs, and there seems to be almost

complete neglect of psychosocial health services to deal with trauma. It is the survivors who must be placed at the center of any evaluation together with the response of their national governments, which after all have primary responsibility for the welfare and security of their citizens.

For putting the survivors at center stage and measuring the national response, there exists a set of international guidelines—the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,⁴ which apply to persons uprooted by conflict as well as natural disaster who remain within the borders of their own countries. The Guiding Principles set forth the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the obligations of governments toward these populations. They cover material assistance, physical safety, and the fundamental civil, political, economic, and social rights of the affected population, based on international human rights and humanitarian law.

Although not a binding document like a treaty, the Guiding Principles are regularly acknowledged by UN resolutions as an important tool and standard for dealing with situations of internal displacement. The UN Secretary General has called upon governments to apply them in situations of mass displacement. The World Summit Document, which heads of state adopted in September 2005, recognized them as “an important international framework for the protection of internally displaced persons” (Art. 132).

As a participant in the process that developed the Guiding Principles, I introduced them in 2001 at a seminar in Jakarta that my project at Brookings organized together with Komnas Ham, Indonesia's Human Rights Commission; CERIC, the Center for Research on Inter-group Relations and Conflict Resolution at the University of Indonesia; and UN agencies.⁵ At the time there were more than one million Indonesians uprooted by conflict, and officials from the central government and the most affected provinces as well as international organizations, NGOs, and research institutions came togeth-

Roberta Cohen is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, where she codirects the Brookings-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement. She also serves as Principal Adviser to the Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

er to discuss the problem. One of the seminar's major recommendations was the dissemination of the Guiding Principles by the Indonesian government to the police and military, regional government officials, and local communities hosting IDPs. Seminar participants also called for the translation of the Principles into Bahasa Indonesian, which was subsequently done.⁶ Further, the Indonesian magazine *TEMPO* featured the Principles.

EVALUATING THE TSUNAMI RESPONSE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Prevention

The Principles begin with prevention, making clear that governments have a responsibility to prevent or mitigate the conditions that lead to displacement. In the case of natural disaster, this means putting into place early warning systems, disaster preparedness plans at the village level, and housing standards that make buildings better equipped to withstand the effects of earthquakes. These are in fact the fundamental rights of populations living in high-risk areas and such populations arguably should be able to claim compensation when public officials fail to take reasonable measures to protect them. Since the tsunami, there has been some progress in this area. An early warning system for the entire Indian Ocean region is being developed to prepare every country's weather service to receive warnings, which should become operational by mid-2006. But this is only a first step. National education campaigns and standards for disaster resistant construction are needed, as called for by the UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, former U.S. president Bill Clinton.⁷ "It takes 10% more to build an earthquake resistant house than to create a death trap," the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator points out, but for every dollar invested, "you reap [tenfold] that amount later in reduced disaster intervention costs."⁸ Indonesia is a country prone to natural disasters, making it important that monitoring take place to ensure that preventive steps are taken.

Access

Another fundamental right of displaced persons is access to humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. Following the tsunami, the Indonesian government to its credit opened up Aceh to foreign air

forces, international and local aid organizations, and the media. But complications arose from carrying out an international relief effort in areas previously closed off to UN agencies and NGOs. Their long absence during years of conflict meant that they were unfamiliar with the terrain, which served to slow the response. Moreover, suspicions about international aid as well as national pride at times interfered with the aid effort. During the first three months in Aceh, foreign agencies did not know whether they would be allowed to stay after March and could not therefore plan effectively. In the case of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it was asked to leave even though UNHCR was engaged in a \$60 million program to build up to 35,000 permanent homes in Aceh. The Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons was able to visit Thailand and Sri Lanka in March but did not receive a visa to visit Indonesia. Despite these early setbacks, the province of Aceh has now become open, UNHCR has been invited back, and there are large numbers of international agencies and NGOs present.

Nondiscrimination

According to basic humanitarian principles, aid must be based on impartiality and nondiscrimination, which means that political opinion, race, religion, and ethnicity are not to influence who receives the aid and in what amount. During the first six months after the tsunami, there were reports of aid being denied to groups or areas suspected of sympathizing with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Where counterterrorism measures were in place, the NGO Forum Asia found, "they were not relaxed to enable all the victims to access aid."⁹ Two groups that did an evaluation found that aid distribution was being used by the military as a political weapon in its struggle with the GAM.¹⁰

Also reported was a disparity in treatment between those uprooted by conflict in Aceh (who numbered some 100,000) and those uprooted by the tsunami (some 500,000). It took until May for aid workers to be allowed to travel beyond the coast into areas ravaged by conflict. One analyst saw large numbers of burnt out and abandoned houses and reported that "survivors of the conflict resent that virtually all the humanitarian assistance was going to tsunami survivors."¹¹ Komnas Ham, Indonesia's Human

Rights Commission, found that those displaced by conflict often lacked basic services and received insufficient assistance for rehabilitation and recovery.¹² A *Jakarta Post* article described those displaced by conflict as “off the radar and agenda of the Indonesian government.”¹³

The peace agreement between the government and the GAM in August 2005 led to efforts to reduce this disparity. The government announced it would deal with both conflict and tsunami-affected populations to avoid inequities and tensions in the reconstruction process. As Human Rights Watch aptly put it, the government found it not to be in its interest to create “a ‘golden’ coastline of new housing and benefits while the rest of the province remains underdeveloped and ravaged by the war.”¹⁴ The Reconstruction Agency for Aceh and Nias (BRR—Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi) set up in April 2005 assumed responsibility for both tsunami and conflict affected areas, with Director Kuntoro Mangkusubroto affirming that the reintegration of both groups is “integral to the peace-building process.”¹⁵ The World Bank has also begun supporting a compensation program for communities affected by conflict. However, the disparity remains, in part exacerbated by many international humanitarian organizations whose funds are earmarked only for those uprooted by the tsunami.

The government has worked to address other inequities as well. For example, it developed a program of providing cash assistance to families hosting IDPs. This ended the disparity between IDPs in government-run relocation centers who received aid and families hosting IDPs who did not. The aid encouraged greater community support for IDPs and their hosts, resulted in IDP registrations and access to other services, and injected cash into the local economy.¹⁶

Protection of Property Rights

The destruction of land title deeds and property records, along with the loss of coastal land, has given rise to problems of compensation, property ownership, and inheritance issues. The absence of formal title has put the poor at a severe disadvantage. Women too, especially widows, may face discrimination in regaining their homes and property. Further, the creation of buffer and security zones has interfered with exercising property rights as well as freedom of movement and the right to earn a living.

Director Kuntoro of the BRR has taken a flexible, pragmatic attitude toward buffer zones, but clear policies and administrative mechanisms are needed to review claims, help survivors replace lost documents, ensure that nontraditional forms of ownership are recognized, clarify the location of exclusion zones, and provide assistance to people who lost their land and livelihoods. Steps are also needed to help widows secure legal title to land and housing in their own names, recognize married women on title deeds, and ensure that orphaned children receive entitlements to land and compensation. The World Bank has been working with the government on land titling issues, and thus far it is reported that “there has been no explosion of land disputes.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, the status of much land is still unclear and Walter Kalin, Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, advises that the most effective way of handling large-scale property issues is to create a dedicated administrative body with a mandate for mediation, adjudication (subject to appeal to courts), and flexible types of remedies. Modification of laws and policies are also needed to “ensure that customary rights and non-traditional forms of ownership evidence are recognized” and to promote women’s rights.¹⁸

Attention to Vulnerable Groups

In every emergency, there are groups with special needs who easily become left behind—the poorest in the affected population, orphans and separated children, single women and women heads of household, elderly people who have lost their families, disabled people, and minority groups.

In the case of children, the Indonesian government—in collaboration with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)—rapidly undertook programs to prevent trafficking. For example, separated children were moved in with extended families and communities rather than being spirited away to other parts of Indonesia or abroad for adoption. Out of 2,393 children orphaned or separated from their parents in Aceh, 85 percent are with relations or family friends, and 400 have been placed in homes.¹⁹ In addition to tracing efforts, guarantees are needed to ensure that children receive entitlements to land and compensation owed to their families.

In the case of women, the presence for many months of military forces in and around relocation

centers, as well as lack of privacy in the barracks set up for IDPs, resulted in a rise in sexual and gender-based abuse.²⁰ In addition, domestic violence has come to the fore as well as reports of forced marriages of young women survivors to older men, given the shortage of women (three times as many women as men perished in the tsunami). Income generation programs for women have been introduced, but the virtual exclusion of women from the rehabilitation and reconstruction process is also regularly reported. UN officials have publicly called for regular consultation with women, recognition of their economic contribution when evaluating compensation for lost property, and steps to overcome discrimination interfering with their regaining their homes and land.

Consultation With Affected Populations

At the 2001 seminar in Jakarta on internal displacement, Indonesian civil society representatives one after the other criticized what they called the “top down approach” of the government in dealing with IDPs. What they wanted was what they called “a bottom up approach,” or consultation with the affected communities. Unfortunately, some of the same criticism is being leveled today. Indeed, one of the reasons large portions of the government’s master plan for Aceh had to be modified was because it was developed with little input from local communities. Throughout the tsunami-affected countries, Representative of the UN Secretary General Kalin and the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing pointed to insufficient consultation with survivors in the formulation of need and loss assessments, aid distribution, and reconstruction. Lack of consultation has resulted in the setting up of temporary housing far from both the livelihoods of survivors and from transport.²¹ It has also resulted in camp designs that fail to protect women.²² If reconstruction plans are to be sustainable and accepted by local communities, consultation mechanisms must not be one-time events but a structured part of the planning process, as called for in the Guiding Principles. To its credit, the BRR’s approach is participatory, and the Women’s Empowerment Bureau of Aceh, the World Bank, and others are seeking to establish consultation mechanisms. Nonetheless, a study published in October 2005 found “a dearth of community involvement in policy making” and insufficient numbers of local people in key positions

in the organizations and international agencies working on reconstruction in Aceh.²³

Preserving the Civilian Character of the Relief and Reconstruction Effort

In the wake of disaster, military capacity can be invaluable. Indeed, the Indonesian military in the first weeks after the disaster played a critical role in saving people, delivering aid, and providing access for humanitarian agencies. But its continued role for months thereafter in the relief effort in Aceh gave rise to concerns that humanitarian aid was being “used as a tool to assert control over a population in need.”²⁴

With the August 2005 peace agreement, such concerns dissipated. At least half of the nearly 50,000 troops in Aceh withdrew and the way is being paved for civilian self-government and oversight of the province. In addition, the BRR has taken over coordination of the reconstruction effort and by most accounts is making progress. Nonetheless, it should be firmly established, whether in peace or wartime, that humanitarian aid is the responsibility of civilian institutions. The military’s long history of human rights abuses in Aceh makes it essential for neutral civilian institutions with experience in relief and reconstruction to be the only ones authorized to oversee the recovery effort, in accordance with internationally recognized humanitarian principles.

Slow Pace of Recovery and Reconstruction

Although timelines are not provided for in the Guiding Principles, it is understood that recovery and reconstruction in response to a disaster must be as speedy as possible. And although some Indonesian government and UN officials defend the pace of the reconstruction on the grounds of the sheer devastation in Aceh and the need for a careful and well-planned response, in May 2005 the head of the BRR expressed shock at the slow pace of the reconstruction. Kuntoro told the press: “There are no roads being built, there are no bridges being built. There are no harbors being built. When it comes to reconstruction, zero.”²⁵ Since its establishment in late April 2005, the BRR has moved quickly to get projects approved for roads, schools, houses, and ports, and in the second half of 2005, construction sped up. But the BRR must cope with a long and growing list of challenges, which slows its work. Bureaucracy is one such challenge, reflected in the

slow disbursement of funds to Aceh and the delays in publishing the reconstruction plan. Coordination is another, with reports of insufficient consultation between the central and provincial governments and between the government and the international community. As for the 120,000 houses that need to be built, there are property ownership issues, shortages of land, the loss of professionals, the inexperience of NGOs in building houses, the scarcity and high price of building materials, and transport and logistical problems.

In addition, there is corruption. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono came into office on an anticorruption platform in 2004 and has been serious in seeking to uproot the practice. Kuntoro was appointed director of the BRR because of his integrity. In fact, he told an audience in Washington that the main reason the reconstruction agency was created was to ensure that it would *not* be tainted by the corrupt practices of other government bodies.²⁶ In addition, investigations and convictions of local officials have been taking place, particularly in Aceh. But it is also true that Transparency International ranked Indonesia among the 20 most corrupt countries in the world. Bribes are reported to be needed for identity cards and land certificates,²⁷ and NGOs like Indonesia Corruption Watch as well as the media have drawn attention to siphoning off of aid by the military, favoritism by local officials toward select constituencies, and the difficulties of the state's auditing agency in accounting for all the donations received.²⁸ A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) document points out that "Weak governing institutions, inadequate rule of law, and pervasive corruption" are the principal obstacles facing the new government.²⁹ Clearly it will be a challenge for the Indonesian government to ensure that corruption does not undermine the response to tsunami reconstruction and that a sharp reduction takes place between the large amount of funds received (\$4.4 billion to date out of \$7.5 billion pledged)³⁰ and the results achieved on the ground.

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY

One promising way to initiate human rights monitoring of the reconstruction plan would be to request Komnas Ham to undertake this role and to strengthen its capacity to do so. National human rights commissions may be created by the state, but

they can exercise a certain amount of independence and are in a position to monitor government performance, advise governments when their policies and laws need to be improved, and receive and act upon complaints.

In August 2005, Komnas Ham—together with the national human rights commissions of the Asia Pacific region—adopted guidelines on internally displaced persons in situations of natural disaster, which call for monitoring by the commissions of how the human rights of IDPs are being respected.³¹

At a meeting of national human rights commissions in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in October 2005, the representative of Komnas Ham pointed out that the commission had been taken offguard by the tsunami, not having been designed to deal with natural disasters. But now it had submitted to the government a list of human rights concerns emanating from the tsunami that should be integrated into policies and programs. These included housing rights, property rights, loss of documentation, participation in reconstruction plans, and the rights and needs of women and children.

But Komnas Ham will need resources and capacity to carry out a monitoring role. The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, together with my project at Brookings, has been working with Komnas Ham to strengthen its capacity with regard to internal displacement. In 2006, Komnas Ham plans to train government officials, military, and police in responding to the rights of displaced persons. However, this is only a first step.

CONCLUSION

Aid programs that pay attention to human rights have a better chance of becoming sustainable and contributing to the long-term stability of the country. In Indonesia, there is room for cautious optimism. It now has a government committed to responding to the needs of the survivors and ensuring that peace and recovery take hold in Aceh. It also has a government seeking to bring the military's financial dealings and involvement in corruption under control. At the same time, much of what was called for by the Jakarta seminar of 2001 is still called for today—nondiscrimination in the provision of aid; better coordination at the national, regional, and local levels; transparency and accountability in the disbursement of funds; mechanisms to ensure that women

have equal rights to land and housing; and the greater involvement of beneficiaries and host communities in the planning and implementation of reconstruction programs. Whether natural disaster or conflict uproots people, the government has the opportunity to “build back better” based on humanitarian and human rights standards. Disasters bring to the fore deep structural problems in countries and provide opportunities to reverse long-standing patterns of discrimination and ethnic conflict. Addressing them can create a strong foundation for recovery.

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TSUNAMI DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN IN ACEH PROVINCE

COURTLAND ROBINSON

The problems faced by Indonesia's tsunami-affected population are myriad—these include loss of family members; loss of homes, assets, livelihoods, and community infrastructure; and displacement into temporary homes and shelters. More than one year after the tsunami, and more than nine months after the response shifted from a relief to rehabilitation phase, a key objective for the local and international rebuilding effort in the next 12 to 18 months will be helping those now living in tents, barracks, or with host families to return to a permanent home or to be resettled into a viable new community.

DISPLACEMENT IN ACEH

While the destruction from the tsunami was unprecedented in its scope, large-scale displacement was not a new phenomenon either in Indonesia or in Aceh Province, closest to the tsunami's epicenter. As of March 2002, 1.1 million Indonesians were officially classified as *pengungsi*, or internally displaced, by the Indonesian government (Hugo 2002). Scattered throughout the country, the *pengungsi* have been uprooted from their homes and have lost possessions and livelihoods as a result of ethnic and political conflict. Since 1998, an estimated 200,000 residents of Aceh Province have been displaced by fighting between government soldiers and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM), with about 14,000 displaced within Aceh and the rest moving to other provinces.

As a result of that conflict, there was significant concern, at least at first, among not only the international community but local residents as well, as to how political tensions and civil conflict would affect tsunami relief aid, resettlement, and reconstruction in Aceh Province. As one human rights group noted in a February 10, 2005, briefing for the Congressional Human Rights Caucus: "Three decades of counter-insurgency operations, capped by two years of martial law and civil emergency, provide several important lessons for those working in Aceh today" (Human

Rights First 2005). The group noted, first, the "politicization of displacement," whereby the Indonesian security forces had come to view displaced Acehnese with suspicion as potential rebel sympathizers, while GAM, for its part, had reportedly used the internally displaced populations for strategic and political ends. "With as many as 100,000 displaced Acehnese scheduled to be moved to semi-permanent relocation camps," Human Rights First noted, "there is reason to fear that this vulnerable population will again be used as pawns."

Human Rights First also noted that the large military presence in Aceh in response to the tsunami's destruction of civilian bureaucracy and civil society organizations "is also the legacy of years of military operations followed by martial law" (imposed in May 2003 and then downgraded to civil emergency status in May 2004). "As the government plans for massive relocation into semi-permanent barracks, the possibility of an army role is also troubling" (Human Rights First 2005).

Initial estimates of tsunami-displaced populations in Aceh fluctuated wildly in the early days of the relief effort. On January 1, 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported a figure of 108,083 Indonesians displaced by the tsunami (WHO 2005). One day earlier, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had estimated the number at 500,000 (USAID 2004). By the end of the first week in January, the Government of Indonesia was reporting 544,927 internally displaced persons (IDPs), although this included 165,083 displaced in Medan, a city outside of Aceh Province (WHO 2005). Within Aceh province, the number of tsunami-displaced people was estimated by UNICEF (which derived its numbers from the Ministry of Health) at 363,679 in mid-January, primarily concentrated in 13 districts, the principal areas being: Banda Aceh (27,980) and Aceh Besar (107,740) at the northern tip of Aceh Province; Pidie (55,099), Bireun (23,550), and Aceh Utara (28,470) on the east coast; and Aceh Barat (56,479) and Aceh Jaya (31,465) on the west coast (UNICEF unpublished data). More informally,

Courtland Robinson is an assistant professor at the Center for Refugee and Disaster Response at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

the number of IDPs was estimated at around 400,000 by the end of January.

In the first four to six weeks following the tsunami, IDPs were classified as living in one of two types of temporary situations: in camps or with host families. The IDP camps (sometimes subdivided into small settlements of under 1,000 people and large settlements of 1,000 or more) numbered at least 250 in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar alone (International Organization for Migration unpublished manuscript) and may have been as high as 326 in those two districts at one point in January. By late January and early February, the Indonesian government had begun to formulate plans to move people out of tent camps and into semi-permanent shelters for up to 18–24 months while more permanent housing was being constructed.

On February 15, 2005, the movement of IDPs to 139 barracks, alternatively called relocation sites or Temporary Living Centers (TLCs), officially began, with about 11,500 people (3,281 families) moving within the first week. Each barrack, typically constructed of wood walls and flooring with a galvanized tin roof, consisted of 12 to 20 rooms per barrack, with one family per room (USAID 2005a). Eventually, the government planned to build a total of more than 863 barracks for roughly 100,000 people.

In early March, officials from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), along with other UN organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), conducted an assessment of five TLCs in Aceh Barat district. Their findings, *inter alia*, were that:

- “Everybody the team met had been living in spontaneous settlements before transferring to the TLCs.”
- “Everybody the team met expressed gratitude [for] being in the TLCs (‘having a roof over their head’). This may be a reflection of how bad the conditions were in the tents rather than the quality of life of the TLCs.”
- “Most people seem to have been assisted by the army when moving into TLCs. . . . Even though the majority have moved on a voluntary basis, the lack of information about length of stay, rights, the future, etc. is overwhelming” (OCHA 2005).

The OCHA-headed team said that problems mentioned by people in most TLCs included: lack of

kitchen sets, lack of jerry cans, lack of sleeping mats, little or no activities for women, insufficiency of potable water, monotonous diet, and general worries about the future. Recommendations included a need for basic household equipment, health awareness campaigns, psychosocial support for both children and adults, livelihood and economic recovery programs, and community organization development. On March 8, 2005, it was reported that Aceh governor Azwar Abubakar had announced that the Indonesian government would halt construction of new barracks at least temporarily and concentrate on making sure existing ones had proper sanitation and clean water (Center of Excellence 2005). As of March 18, the number of people living in the TLCs was estimated at 41,855 (OCHA 2005).

As the debate swirled about the status of conditions in the TLCs and their short- and long-term utility, work progressed slowly on the rebuilding of permanent homes for the tsunami-displaced populations. By mid-October, the Aceh-Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR) estimated that 105,000 housing units had been destroyed by the tsunami, of which an estimated 30,000 would be rebuilt in 2005, with 78,000 more in 2006, and another 12,000 in 2007 (the total of 120,000 includes 15,000 houses for those displaced by a March 2005 earthquake on Nias Island) (*TEMPO* 2006). Of the 30,000 houses targeted for construction in 2005, however, only 10,119 had been completed by October. While the overall slow pace of construction has drawn complaints, some local communities have also complained about the substandard construction of some of the housing and/or the lack of local participation in design and construction.

In August and September 2005, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, in collaboration with Mercy Corps, conducted a survey of more than 600 households in the Banda Aceh and Meulaboh areas. Although the study was limited to a randomized sample of 70 villages, it was observed that, of all the households ever displaced by the tsunami, 70 percent remained displaced as of eight or nine months after the tsunami and were living in a temporary shelter/camp, barracks/public building, or with a host family. Of the 30 percent of the households that had returned and were no longer considered displaced, most had gone back to their original homes (generally speaking, these were households displaced from a village that had received moderate

rather than severe impacts from the tsunami). Discounting these households that did not need new, permanent housing, it could be estimated that less than 10 percent of those who needed permanent replacement housing had received a new house by August or September (this is consistent with the Aceh-wide data from BRR that only 10,119 of 105,000 destroyed houses had been rebuilt by the end of October). Despite the slow pace of reconstruction, 90 percent of households still displaced outside their original communities said they were intent on returning and 88 percent of households living in temporary accommodations in their home villages said they planned to rebuild permanently.

RETURN AND RELOCATION IN 2006

Neither the terrors of the tsunami nor the trials of prolonged displacement seems to have shaken the resolve of most households to return home and rebuild again. In 2006, the key for the Indonesian government and the international community will be to improve temporary living conditions for those still displaced in tents and barracks while accelerating the process of reconstructing permanent homes and communities.

Temporary Shelter

On March 26, 2005, the Government of Indonesia unveiled its “Master Plan,” a five-year, U.S.\$5.1 billion blueprint for the rebuilding of Aceh Province, which highlighted the shift from the relief efforts of the first three months post-tsunami to a rehabilitation phase that aimed to “restore basic social services” by the end of 2006, followed by a reconstruction phase through the end of 2009 (BRR 2005a). As part of its master plan, the government established a ministerial level agency, the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), which became operational in April 2005. In conjunction with the Office of the UN Recovery Coordinator in Aceh and Nias, and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), BRR developed a Temporary Shelter Plan of Action, with three main objectives for 2006 (BRR 2005b).

The first objective is to replace approximately 26,000 old and worn-out tents with new ones, as well as to erect 10,000–20,000 prefabricated shelter kits to upgrade living facilities for those in temporary living situations (UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery 2006). The aim here is to get the estimat-

ed 67,500 people living in tents at the end of 2005 into new tents in early 2006, and then out of tents into better—albeit still temporary—shelters by the middle of 2006 (BRR 2005b).

The second objective is to work with a network of NGOs to improve 1,660 Temporary Living Centers at 126 sites, including structural repairs and the provision of adequate water and sanitation facilities. While the TLCs, or barracks, are not ideal, they must be made more livable for another 12 to 18 months, giving time for permanent housing to be constructed. At the end of October 2005, an estimated 75,000 people were living in the TLCs (Oxfam 2005).

Finally, the plan of action provides for assistance to the estimated 293,000 people living with host families. Here the plan calls for upgrades of houses in host communities, including construction of additions and annexes, and improvements in water and sanitation facilities.

Permanent Housing

At the end of 2005, BRR estimated that 16,200 new homes had been completed and another 13,200 were underway. Current projections are that an additional 75,000 homes would be constructed in 2006 with a goal of completing all housing construction by the middle of 2007 (BRR 2005b). The reconstruction effort—which, in the middle to latter parts of 2005, was widely criticized both within and outside of the humanitarian community for lengthy delays, false starts, and poor coordination—seems to be finding its stride one year after the tsunami, though formidable challenges remain. A BRR report, “Aceh and Nias One Year After the Tsunami,” has noted several of the most complex challenges:

- “Land has to be cleared of millions of tons of debris and silt before it can be used again—whether for farming or building houses; and before building houses it is vital to establish who owns what land.”
- “Large areas of land are no longer suitable for housing because they are now flood plains due to tectonic plate shifts that depressed much of the coastal shelf by up to 1.5 meters.”
- “Water, sewerage, electricity, public transport, and other service connections must be planned before houses are built to ensure communities become viable again.”

In addition, the report found that damaged or destroyed infrastructure—roads, bridges, port facilities—further complicates the logistics of moving thousands of tons of building supplies needed for reconstruction (BRR 2005b).

As housing construction began, local efforts were complicated by the fact that the tsunami often washed away visible traces of property boundaries, destroyed records, and killed many of those who had served as “human archives” of village lines. Programs are now underway to restore property rights using participatory mapping approaches—indeed, the Indonesian government insists that its top-down “Master Plan” idea has given way to Community-Driven Development (CDD), an evolution in thinking that bodes well for future reconstruction efforts—but, as the cost of housing materials has increased, so too have concerns over quality and equity. There is a vital need to control land speculation and evictions and to protect the property rights of vulnerable populations, especially orphans, widows, and other heirs (BRR 2005b).

It is also important to recognize that the pressure to show visible signs of progress has led to more construction in the Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar areas, as well as in locations more readily accessible by road. Forward progress may be harder to sustain after the “low hanging fruit” has been harvested and it is time to focus on the devastated west coast and on the islands. Equally challenging will be the effort to relocate an estimated 30,000 families who are likely to have to move permanently to areas other than their original villages.

In the “Spatial Plans for Affected Areas,” the government’s Master Plan specified that chief among its general policies and strategies in guiding spatial planning would be to “give residents freedom of choice in deciding whether to return to their place of origin or to move to another location,” a policy in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA 2004) which had been used by a variety of UN agencies as a normative framework guiding return and resettlement. The Master Plan also noted, however, that

in the event that land (a) has been destroyed or flooded, (b) is so polluted as to be unfit for settlement, or (c) is needed to safeguard the entire community from future disasters (such as escape routes or buffer zones), the government

will provide aid or fair compensation to the owner. In circumstances (a) or (b), each family will receive 200 square meters of land with a core house of 36 square meters at a location chosen by the government. In circumstances (c), compensation will be governed by relevant laws and regulations (BRR 2005a).

To help displaced people return home and rebuild is difficult enough; to help tens of thousands establish stable lives and livelihoods in new communities is a far greater challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

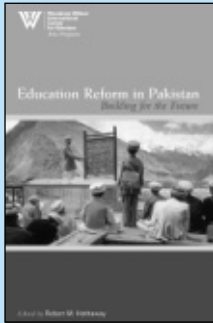
The full impact of the Asian tsunami in Aceh Province, in terms of lives lost and physical destruction, may never be fully measured. Given the catastrophic loss of lives and property to the tsunami, it is critical that reconstruction achieve its goals in 2006 and beyond, and that all displaced households have an opportunity to return home or resettle permanently in another community by 2007. The transition from relief to rehabilitation is a complex process and may necessarily be measured not in months but years; viewed from the perspective of those still living in temporary camps and shelters, it can seem painstakingly slow. In the end, however, the success of return or relocation programs should be measured not in terms of speed but in terms of their capacity to promote community participation in the reconstruction process as well as to not only restore but improve upon preexisting conditions of health, life, and livelihood.

The focus on community-driven development in post-tsunami reconstruction is commendable. It must be supported, sustained, and standardized so that an urban neighborhood in Banda Aceh and a remote village on Nias Island feel like equal participants in the rebuilding process. The model, moreover, can and should extend to NGOs, international organizations, and the donor community. Participatory decision making, accountability, and a focus on family and community measures of successful return or relocation—and not the amount of money raised or spent—will be the hallmarks of a well-managed reconstruction effort.

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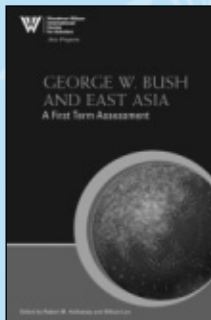


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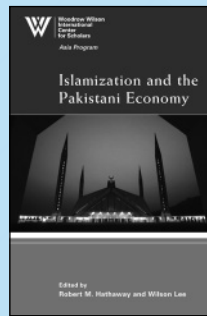


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