



Canadian Red Cross
Croix-Rouge canadienne

Red Cross ... Anywhere. Anytime.

Devastation in Asia: helping those impacted by tsunamis

February, 2005

The need

As the world struggles to comprehend the enormity of the disaster that has struck in Asia, millions of survivors need help urgently.

The strongest earthquake in 40 years, registering 9.0 on the Richter scale, sent walls of water slamming into a dozen Asian countries. Coastlines, villages, resorts and entire islands were inundated and destroyed by tsunamis. With over 275,000 assumed dead and more than 1.5 million displaced, the staggering human toll of this horrific catastrophe is still being calculated every day. Millions were affected in 12 countries, including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Maldives, and Malaysia. This is one of the most devastating natural disasters to strike in decades.



Efforts have been underway since the crisis began to help the living and collect the dead, to reunite families and to do whatever possible and necessary to alleviate suffering. Clean water and water purification were a high priority, and helped prevent a large number of deaths caused by waterborne disease and malaria.

However, the need for housing, food, medical supplies and economic stability is great. Psychological trauma is widespread. The victims of this catastrophe, those whose villages and livelihoods were washed away in minutes, will face a long struggle to rebuild lives and communities in the face of so much destruction.

How Red Cross is helping

The outpouring of generosity from individuals, corporations and governments has been unprecedented—allowing Red Cross to undertake its biggest-ever international relief operation. Red Cross is committed to turning this generosity into significant and long-standing help for the survivors of this catastrophe.

Canadian donations to the Red Cross are already in action, playing a significant part in alleviating suffering.

Local and international Red Cross organizations began to assist immediately in the wake of the tsunamis. While local volunteers in the affected countries provided first aid, evacuation and rescue and helped with the difficult job of gathering and burying corpses, the International Red Cross began appealing for and coordinating aid from around the globe.

Over 200 flights carrying Red Cross personnel and relief goods have arrived in the affected areas. These contained medicine and clean water for hundreds of thousands of people. Relief parcels containing everything from cooking sets to bedsheets to shelter supplies are being given to families. Distribution is being undertaken by both local and international Red Cross workers.

The Canadian Red Cross has been an integral part of this enormous relief effort, immediately releasing funds to help and launching an urgent public appeal. Within 48 hours, Red Cross put Canadian donations to work, dispatching a shipment of 25 tonnes of plastic sheets, water containers and water purification tablets, in cooperation with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Department of National Defence. A few days later, we received confirmation from a Canadian delegate on the ground that those essential items had been distributed to families in the north, east and south regions of Sri Lanka.

Since then, hundreds of metric tonnes of urgently needed relief items—for example shelter materials, large water containers and pumps, portable warehouses, flashlights, batteries and blankets—have been purchased and sent by Canadian Red Cross, in collaboration with the Canadian government, to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar and Maldives. About 770,000 water purification sachets—enough to purify over 15 million litres of water—have been delivered to Sri Lanka. We also sent a large shipment of medical supplies to Indonesia, including gauze, bandages and medical tools required to dress wounds. About 60,000 infant care kits were compiled and sent to Indonesia. Pharmaceuticals for children and adults, including antibiotics, painkillers and oral rehydration salts, were shipped to Maldives. We also provided 50,000 family hygiene kits containing a month’s supply of toothpaste, tooth brushes, shampoo, toilet paper, soap, sanitary pads, razors, washing detergent and towels to families in Sri Lanka.

There are 17 Emergency Response Units from around the world still active in affected countries: these are world class specialists in water and sanitation, health care, aid distribution, telecommunications and logistics. The Canadian Red Cross has also sent over 20 trained disaster relief specialists to help in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Maldives, and several more Canadian Red Cross health workers are ready to go when needed.

The International Red Cross is also helping to restore family contact for those who are seeking news of loved ones. An international website that lists names of survivors and those seeking news, has received millions of visitors. To date, nearly 13,000 people in Indonesia and Sri Lanka have been able to restore family links and learn whether family members are still alive.

The Years Ahead - Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

The years ahead will be difficult for the millions of people affected by this disaster as they strive to rebuild their lives and communities. With homes and whole villages demolished and livelihoods washed away, outside help will be required.

While responding to the desperate and urgent need now, Red Cross teams are also assessing long-term needs and planning now for rehabilitation activities. We work actively with local communities to develop appropriate plans, and communicate with other aid organizations and governments to limit duplication and ensure the unmet needs of the most vulnerable groups are addressed.

The Red Cross is very thankful for the overwhelming support from businesses, organizations and individuals.