



## Report on Wilton Park Conference WPS05/29

### IMPROVING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY

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in Association with:  
United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

***Though much has been achieved in preparing for disasters, much more could be done to ensure the consistency of response and to increase the capacities of the most vulnerable communities to cope with the sudden onset of a disaster.***

1. The conference focused on the disaster response capacity of those developing countries which are most prone to natural disasters. The meeting continued the discussions that began at Wilton Park in September 2002 (conference No 682) April 2003 (conference No 710) and September 2004 (conference WP 754). The first two conferences considered the preparation for natural disasters: the first in reducing the risks, the second improving the response. The third conference dealt with the immediate response to disasters: improving the national and international frameworks.

2. The first conclusion of the first conference held in 2002 was that national disasters were increasing in frequency, scale and intensity. Preparation was needed to mitigate their impact. National governments, donor agencies and multilateral institutions needed to recognise that it would be cheaper to prepare for a natural disaster than repair after its onset. Disaster reduction should be an integral part of overall national development strategies in hazard prone countries (whether rich or poor) to avoid losing decades of development gains. Existing good practice in disaster management, often local or regional in nature, needed to be replicated and scaled-up. An important conclusion of the conference was that there needed to be greater cooperation across the "Disaster Community", with calls for a coalition of stakeholders-those involved with disaster relief- to lobby more effectively. It was

considered very necessary for the disaster community to engage more effectively with those concerned with development and climate change.

***More effective prevention strategies would save not only tens of billions of dollars, but tens of thousands of lives.***

***Though much had been achieved in preparing for disasters, much more could be done to ensure a consistency of response and to increase the capacities of the most vulnerable communities to cope with disasters.***

3. The second Wilton Park meeting in 2003, which also discussed disaster response, concluded that it was often uneven. There was a need to have effective, well-tested, well-funded national response systems with well-trained local responders who should be supported with resources and political backing. On the ground, the response to a disaster ought to be flexible and innovative. Local requirements must be accurately assessed and the response should be requirement-led not resource driven. The international community should be made aware that natural disasters affect seven times more people per annum than those affected by military conflict. The Tsunami of 2004 reminded the world of the potential scale of natural disasters. The balance of preparedness must shift away from reactive response, as in military emergency, towards proactive preparedness.

4. The third Wilton Park meeting concluded that much had been achieved at national, regional and international level to improve the delivery of immediate life- saving assistance in response to natural disasters. Even in developing countries, 90% of relief comes from the affected governments. Yet, as the 2004 Tsunami tragically demonstrated, many of the most vulnerable countries are not prepared for a large-scale disaster. Local communities must be capable of facing a disaster and minimising its impact. Specific recommendations included improving the quality of the national response and the setting up of appropriate internal response mechanisms. It was vital to identify common standards for basic relief items similar to the essential drugs list, while setting up a common database of supplies and ensuring greater cooperation on procurement and logistics between the different humanitarian responders.

5. The international community should not be there to do the job for the national governments but to do it with them. The aim should be *“to train everybody so that the humanitarian industry is put out of business”*. Given climate change, more needed to be done at national, local government and community level if the impact of disasters is not to be even more devastating. There were signs that the national and international responses would continue to improve.

6. The key lesson from recent disasters is that there are more to come. Neither nature nor man's handiwork has created a stable world. There are costly issues to deal with and rightly there are rising expectations. As we can do better, we have an obligation to do better. Sometimes emergencies do no harm, because the response is very well organised. The ideal response combines a continuity of knowledge and experience, diffused throughout a population but reinforced by professionals who can enhance the relevant capabilities. There are some obvious observations. There should be international minimum standards to ensure added capability. Disasters are no longer the sole concern of an affected country or region, and accident proneness now occurs in regions which are not generally thought of as disaster prone. Every year, parts of Europe go under water. The Danube and the UK are good examples as are mudslides in Sweden. We need to share knowledge and experience across the world. How should we cope with another Tsunami?

7. Recent events highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of our governments, and demonstrated the need for frameworks. The Tsunami proved the importance of rapid mobilisation. New partners need to be identified. There is a need to ensure collaboration with military authorities. That can sometimes be straightforward, but complications may arise, especially where there is political tension. There needs to be a rapid mobilisation of financial resources. This should not rely on voluntary initiatives or charitable donations.

8. There should be a recognised international basis for global financial support. There is still a lack of early warning systems, though there have been recent exercises in the Pacific involving thirty countries to identify Tsunamis. Japan has an effective system. Bangladesh has a built-in early-warning system for flooding which is nationally recognised, though there needs to be more effective structures to overcome food insecurity. There is a further problem the effective structures of yesteryear can find themselves out of date, especially if there are rapid political changes. So nations and global institutions need to remain flexible and to be ready to adopt new responsibilities. People need to be educated throughout the world about disaster preparation. We have very good workshops but the knowledge gained from them needs to be internationally disseminated to all stakeholders. We know disasters are costly. We can expect them to become even more costly in the future, and governments need to prepare for this.

9. If a government does not come to the aid of its people, other countries need to be persuaded to help. If a government is unwilling to share its problems internationally until it is too late, the UN should try to exercise effective pressure.

10. Governments can be an easy target for unfair complaints. How could Thailand identify the bodies of foreign Tsunami victims without international help? Bodies disappear and those which are retrieved will rarely have passports available for identification. The Swedish government asked the UN to intervene, but that is easier said than done. This is a big international problem. Guatemala was hit by a hurricane in October 2005 which affected 3% of its GDP. But there was a very poor response to its appeal for help, even through the UN. Initially, there was a good response to the South Asian earthquake of October 2005, but then help fizzled out. How can the humanitarian impulse be canalised so as to ensure effective and sustained help? When we look back over 20-30 years, we see that we have been here before. We are always left with the same questions and concerns. We are still searching for the right humanitarian, economic and political leverages.

11. National disasters create a short-term momentum of their own. Can this be used to improve political leadership and raise standards? Some countries are nervous of allowing foreign help to bolster their own domestic institutions. But without the responsible political leadership, even small disasters can rapidly escalate into crises and become very expensive. That is why disaster reduction is the responsibility of a global movement with a humanitarian political will. International response has evolved, as has the collaborative agenda. Military help no longer operates in a vacuum. In many countries, it can also act as a well-trained Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Help needs coordination. We welcome private sector help, but it needs to be subject to a pre-recognised set of rules. Donor governments and institutions can have problems with NGOs, yet there needs to be recognition of their role in times of emergencies. We must not ignore private sectors capacity for innovation and technology.

12. The diversity of nations means that the military is regarded in different ways across the world. Some nations still have national service, others purely a professional force. In some countries, the neighbouring military is seen as a threat rather as a potential source of help. But NGOs can create similar problems. Four hundred different agencies came to Aceh to help after the Tsunami. Many of them did not want to coordinate with each other and not all of them were mindful of local political, economic and cultural conditions. Each country should have a register of recognised groups for future emergencies while NGOs should be mindful of import regulations, as well as cultural and religious differences. International funding needs to be regulated and available on immediate request during the onset stage of emergencies.

**Improving capacities: What should a national responsible system ideally consist of? What can be done to ensure that response systems are efficient and effective when a disaster strikes?**

13. While there has been some improvement in specific countries over the last few years, there is still much work to be done. From an international standpoint there needs to be more cooperation between countries which ought to share the same disaster mitigation procedures. It is no good having a disaster plan and then keeping it a state secret. Nor should a district rely on one mayor having ultimate authority and controlling communications in his area. After all he might be killed or cut off. Each country should look at its plans and reinvigorate national laws. Disaster mitigation should be kept clear of political conflict. There is a need for constant dialogue between national and local institutions. There should be budgetary preparations. Countries at risk should not seek to reduce the sums set aside for disasters. The riches of civil society need to be mobilised in the great task of disaster relief. Without local participation, there cannot be an effective response system. It is the locals who will invariably be required to carry out the initial emergency and remedial work. It is necessary that all parts of a national response system be integrated with a clear command structure. Early warning systems must be part of a nation's everyday life.

14. At most national levels, disaster response is primarily a political issue. Political leaders look for political dividends and wish to placate their electorates. There is also a power dividend for managers who handle human and financial resources. They can gain prestige by their visibility after a disaster. This is one reason why disaster mitigation and reduction receives considerably less attention. It does not have the same political impact.

15. In each country, laws are required to determine the institutional set up for disaster response. In theory, good laws could lead to well organised and effective institutions. In practice, laws often reflect political interests and power balances. This results in weak, redundant, and generally ineffective institutions prone to meddling from the top and open to distortion under military direction. Laws must not be kept as state secrets but shared with all stakeholders inside a country and with international aid agencies. More time is spent on legislating for disasters than preparing a people for disasters. Armenia, Ecuador and Nepal are examples of this malpractice. However, there are good examples such as Iran, where overall responsibility for disaster management rests with the Ministry of Interior. All operational and policy matters are dealt with by a task force including representatives of all concerned ministries and agencies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs liaises with international agencies. In the provinces, there are task forces which direct hazard-specific committees, chaired by the local representative of the Ministry.

16. There needs to be much concentration on national resources, which vary from country to country. In the same way, command control and coordination needs to be understood on a national level as well an international one, so that they can perform their most essential duty; keeping society intact. In particular, early warning systems must be part of a national education curriculum. Without it, knowledge cannot be disseminated properly. That, rather than technology, is the greater problem. Unless there is a properly coordinated national programme there is little chance that international aid can be properly requested or applied.

17. The international community can help by promoting legal and institutional reform. It should not be afraid to press the case for effective disaster management even if this irritates some governments. Efforts should be made to establish international guiding principles. Governments need to be assisted in the process of establishing or reforming disaster response institutions. The guiding principles can also ensure that there are audit checks on both national institutions and international relief aid agencies.

18. The principles to recommend to national authorities could be: one national disaster law, one body in overall charge of disaster response with other relevant bodies participating. There needs to be adequate financing of disaster management, institutions and activities, plus an understanding of decentralisation and the need for systematic involvement of civil societies and communities. There needs to be a clear link to regional cooperation and clear mechanisms for requesting international assistance with administrative procedures to facilitate emergency help.

**What particular steps can the international community take to support national and regional response preparedness?**

19. In the public eye disaster response has taken the form of 'The fifth cavalry rides to the rescue'. That is the only visible end result. But even if it fails to capture the global public's imagination, important work ought to take place long before the disaster strikes. This could create problems in the international humanitarian community with its bias towards complex emergencies. Moreover, some international institutions find it hard to deal with strong governments. There is a further problem that even if effective staff members create good links between their international and the host government, they tend to be promoted to new responsibilities in different countries. Therefore sometimes, the links will suffer. As far as the UN is concerned, in the field of disaster response preparations, implementations of Resolution 46/182 (1991) has had a negative effect; creating as it did the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator

(UNDRO) and Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Even the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has had difficulties in the last few years.

20. We cannot prevent disasters. We can mitigate their effects. Response-preparedness reduces risk and increases survivability. This could be an attractive way of persuading governments to understand response preparations.

21. Countries rarely lack the will but they often lack the knowledge, and resources because of competing development priorities which seem more urgent to their citizens. Countries need help with experienced analysis and advice on disaster management systems; federal, state, regional and international. In particular, early warning systems and first responder capacity such as fire services, contingency planning and exercises at the district and town level, national education and communications- all add to preparedness.

22. International communities need to support national endeavours. Disaster response preparedness is a long haul, not a quick fix. Everybody needs to understand a country for what it is; alien conditions should not be imposed on differing cultures. The international community has to listen as well as teach. Exercises should be encouraged, as should full partnership with NGOs such as the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Crystal, thus developing exposure to international best practice. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Co-ordination team (UNDAC) has carried out a very successful mission with Mongolia and is now in talks with Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Georgia and the Philippines. At present, unfortunately, very few donors offer such long-term partnership and capacity building. The Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) are notable exceptions. A more effective and appropriate humanitarian assistance and technical assistance programme has to be driven by a better understanding of how stricken countries define their priorities. A better appreciation of the national policy frameworks and articulation process is indispensable to the structuring of international and regional support. It is important to remember that donor country funds and aid organisations do not have to be accountable to governments.

23. Regional response preparedness is different from national response. Multiple governments are involved and their inter-relationships can be affected by both international and regional politics. An entity needs to be created that is entirely neutral, such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Co-ordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC) or the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). Consensus in decision-making is essential and should not be dominated by any one country, even if it perceives itself as more important

because of its donor status. There are many recent examples of International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) meetings that have developed a de-politicised process towards consensus. In 2005 Delhi hosted an INSARAG meeting to which 25 countries sent representatives, including Pakistan. ASEAN have now created its own disaster management and emergency response plan. In essence, there needs to be structured and sustained support for the institutionalisation of preparedness. The CDERA community have developed a framework within which national agencies and partner interventions can be harmonised. The comprehensive disaster management consensus places all elements of disaster management within our global sustainable development agenda. This common goal around which five key results are articulated, creates a facility for standards sharing, and capacity development is formed through local context.

- I. Stronger regional and national institutions to promote Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM).
- II. Research, education and training support CDM.
- III. Major regional institutions and donors incorporate CDM in their own programmes and promotes CDM to their national members.
- IV. Preparedness, response and mitigation capability is enhanced and integrated.
- V. Hazard information is incorporated into development planning and decision-making.

24. There are five areas within the theme of building resilient communities within a ten-year programme.

- I. Hazard mapping and vulnerability assessment
- II. Flood management
- III. Community disaster planning
- IV. Early warning systems
- VI. Climate change and knowledge management

It is important to determine political commitment, to know the legal and regulatory frameworks and to assess and develop capacity. Opportunities in country support programmes; poverty alleviation interventions, climate change and early warning systems programmes should be explored for introducing the principles and practice of disaster reduction. The Caribbean has developed a CDM matrix that allows information at all levels and helps to address critical capacity gaps.

### **Away from the capital: the preparations of local governments**

25. The example of the Philippines in terms of preparedness of local governments is exceptionally good as the land mass is spread over a great distance. Every year the country receives on average 20 typhoons of which 50% are destructive, at an annual average cost of \$300m. The country has had a disaster management law in place since 1978, which aimed

to establish the national programme on community disaster preparedness. The legislation laid out the individual roles of provincial governors, city and municipal mayors, and Baranagay (community) chairmen. Self-reliance was encouraged alongside mutual assistance and each leader was made responsible for documented plans of his emergency functions and activities. Each area had to utilise its own facilities first before calling on a neighbouring unit. The primary responsibility rests on the government agencies in the affected areas in coordination with the people themselves. The national government exists to support the local governments in times of emergencies. The national coordination council is the highest policy-making coordination and supervising body, advising the President in periods of emergency, recommending when states of calamity had occurred and when funds should be released. At the lowest end of the organisational network, there are 41,956 Barangay disaster-coordinating councils. The Office of Civil Defence was created to prepare the nation and administer a comprehensive national Civil Defence and assistance programme. All hazards are included: geophysical, hydro-meteorological, terrorism, epidemics, civil disturbance, infestation, nuclear and radiological. Among the directions granted under the local government Act of 1991, the executive order 137 declares the month of July of every year as national disaster consciousness month. This is similar to the Caribbean where there is a massive campaign amongst the different islands to remind residents to prepare for the hurricane season, which begins in June. Multi-hazard maps identify the most vulnerable communities, which are targeted in conduct of contingency planning.

26. The record of the National Disaster Co-ordinating Council (NDCC) in the Philippines shows four areas of achievement, providing a national platform for integration of all stakeholders, developing strong linkages with national and international agencies, ensuring the public's active participation. Risk reduction methods must be community specific, to develop disaster resilient communities. Every three years the governors go on training courses, and important disaster dates are taught in schools to keep the next generations aware of how their own country suffered and how to prepare in the event of landslides, hurricanes and volcanic explosions.

### **Strengthening civil society for disaster management neighbourhood disaster volunteers- a new approach in Turkey**

27. Experience shows that successful disaster management volunteer work can occur as part of civil defence. The local resident will always be a key figure in disaster response. After the earthquakes in 1999, volunteer groups were founded in 50 neighbourhood areas. The national response programme showed that many of the problems were in the secondary field of industrial landscapes- such as chemical plants. The problem that Turkey faced showed

that no country is capable of coping alone with a seismic disaster. Neighbourhood disaster volunteers (NDV) will have little knowledge relevant to subsequent chemical explosions or water pollution. Invariably there is not enough essential equipment for remedial work in the aftermath. When professionals arrived on the scene in 1999, there were no mechanisms to ensure cooperation between them and the local population. Since then, Turkey has discovered that local volunteers can be empowered to help themselves. The first seventy-two hours are the most precious time for saving lives and evaluating disaster level. So it is vital to have neighbourhood teams which can cooperate with both the central government and each other.

28. The training programmes included basic geological and meteorological knowledge, basic fire fighting and prevention, basic first aid, basic search and rescue techniques plus disaster psychology. Local volunteers can help direct traffic and understand where food supplies and other essential equipment are stored or easily obtained, and where meeting points and operational centres can best be located.

29. This new approach by the Turkish government was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, who recognised that eighty per cent of earthquake victims are rescued by local residents. As a result they were keen to create training programmes since poorly prepared rescuers may actually cause unnecessary injury to the disaster victims and themselves. A NDV network depends upon volunteerism; the willingness of people to contribute their time, energy and resources to training, organisational activities and community services. Their willingness is motivated mainly by people's concerns to protect themselves, their families and their neighbours. A certain risk awareness at community level is therefore important to encourage people to become volunteers. The basic training courses for new volunteers last thirty-two hours and include instruction and practical exercises organised into five training modules given by professional instructors (eg from the fire brigade or civil defence). In Turkey the local neighbourhood leader (Muhtar) is the ex officio chairman of a NDV.

### **What legislation is needed?**

30. The experience of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies demonstrates the effective regulation of the domestic response as well as national laws affecting international assistance and solidarity. This is a topic of growing concern to the international federations and their one hundred and eighty-three member societies.

31. The first element of disaster response is reducing the risk of disasters and recognising that risk reduction is a development concern. This is now recognised in the

Hyogo framework of action. Law can address risk reduction from many different angles—urban planning, building codes, shoreline and waterway management, industrial transport and environmental regulation policy. Secondary legislation addressing poverty reduction and agricultural management should also be seen as a component of an overall programme to reduce vulnerability to hazard. The Hyogo framework also encourages community empowerment. Laws can help to educate communities about hazards, and to establish early warning systems. The example of Bangladesh's regime on cyclone preparedness response is extremely useful.

32. Laws help define institutional structures between ministries and different levels of government and help to recognise the role of non-governmental organisations such as independent national Red Cross or Red Crescent societies. In some countries the regional RC and CM represents the most efficient response to disaster, even though their role is not clearly recognised by national or local laws.

33. Human rights need to be protected by disaster legislation, in particular the protection of women and children in many areas of the world, as well as property rights issues which may be affected by reconstruction. There needs to be adequate legislation to anticipate international assistance. Laws should assist governments to react in the most favourable way to assist threatened communities, especially within the first forty-eight hours. This will cut down unnecessary delay and chaos in asking for international help. National laws should not block domestic non-state actors from receiving help when they request assistance from foreign sources; seconded staff will often donate goods, equipment and financial aid. The argument is particularly strong within the IFRC.

34. The mechanics of entry must also be recognised on a legal basis so as to facilitate the import through customs of much-needed goods, medicines and equipment. The experience of the Tsunami highlighted problems of tariffs on goods needed, for the survival of people in their own countries. The requirements of different ministries- especially health for medicine and agriculture for food, -need to be understood and simplified. There have been plenty of recent examples whether it is the import of medicine to Indonesia or meat to the United States following Katrina. In order for international help to be efficient, the aid workers need to get in to action as fast as possible. So it should be made easy for them to open bank accounts, drive vehicles legally and administer drugs.

### **Improving response at community level**

35. This is very important in severely hampered developing countries, especially in Africa where disasters often occur annually and are undermining traditional society. In Zambia out

of a population of ten million people, three million are street children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Indeed thirty four per cent of the population has HIV. The Red Cross has as much work to do there as in the rest of Africa.

36. There are huge problems. Most programmes are donor driven; very few are local. Programmes last as long as the available funding and are not part of the national budget. This does not encourage local professional managers to be trained. So the African voice is not heard around the tables seeking solutions, which are driven by donor nations, who are worried about the level of inherent corruption.

37. Communities have responsibility but no capacity. That said, NEPARC was founded in 2004 at a meeting of fifteen Africa IFRC members. It plans to achieve world-class standards in governance, transparency and accountability. The 15 members wish to become models of excellence in disaster response and hope to gain the confidence of donor nations as well as becoming the natural preferred partner of choice with their governments. There is already evidence that the status of the National Red Cross Societies are improving throughout Africa. Governments are beginning to help generate activities, and Harvard University is involved in developing a proper programme audit. Among the international charities operating in Africa, there is a conscious effort to avoid the complaint of financial colonialism.

### **Strengthening communities post disaster: Bringing the best of Asia to Aceh**

38. MERCY of Malaysia was cited as an example. This institution showed its strength in the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami. MERCY was able to act as a facilitator within a shared culture. The organisation was able to identify land on which scattered villagers could regroup. When it came to interaction and communication, MERCY made extensive use of villages' pre-disaster social hierarchy (as opposed to working through government officials from outside the region), so they were able to restore the social structures of many villages. MERCY is now encouraging other Malaysian NGOs to use the same system and share their network of corporate partners. It has also assisted Pakistani villages to recover from the 2005 earthquake. There are also lessons to be learnt in terms of overcoming cultural sensitivities. In Sudan, MERCY seeks flexible solutions in order to work around cultural barriers to effective humanitarian action, such as restrictions on the movement of women and girls. MERCY is able to speak directly to the warlords about the need to treat patients regardless of their gender, and offer day care for children while their mothers receive treatment. This negotiation was very necessary since the warlords would not allow children to be left unattended, thus denying women the chance to leave home for treatment. The same problem is prevalent throughout Afghanistan, where many deaths are being caused in childbirth since there is no easy access to maternity hospitals.

## **Building in disaster response planning into overall risk reduction**

39. Disaster response should be built into overall risk reduction. Switzerland may be one of the most advanced societies on earth, yet every year there are significant amounts of small everyday disasters in its villages and small towns, and much of the professional help is often criticised as being too late on the scene, in the wrong location when a disaster occurs (how long before for a fire brigade or ambulance appears) or arriving with inadequate equipment. There are important issues for each country whether you face avalanches or Tsunamis.

40. Relief and rehabilitation should occur simultaneously. The Swiss government's strategy for disaster reduction raises three main questions: risk assessment, risk evaluation and risk reduction. There are also three mechanisms of the risk management cycle: mitigation, response and recovery. All stakeholders should be addressed so that they understand the principles of sustainability.

41. What is risk? There can be historical confusion. In Sorenberg, where a mountain collapsed in 1910, the ground is still moving today. Even the new village built nearby after 1910 is now threatened, but its views make it an important tourist attraction. We have to ask communities why they stay where they are in spite of threats. Protection goals need to be set and understood, but the villagers need to look beyond their own municipal authorities to understand how risks can be reduced.

42. Every house needs to be insured against the same risks as part of a solidarity group. New house building must only take place within recognised areas. Since the Tsunami, Sri Lanka has forbidden new buildings less than six hundred metres from the sea. Yet in many countries, sea resorts are still being built on the edge of cliffs and sand valleys, especially in the Middle East. Insurance companies in the United Kingdom are refusing to insure people who live in flood plains. This can cause complications. Nineteen out of twenty five Cantons in Switzerland have a law which states that all households need to be insured. Yet in Pakistan, you cannot insure if you are in rented accommodation, and in many underdeveloped countries micro credit does not allow for insurance premiums to be paid.

43. Urbanisation is becoming more rapid. Too much marginal land is being used up in developing countries. People need to be protected by law against being moved to uninsurable sites. Insurance is often portrayed as a toy for rich countries where high safety standards are in place, which could not apply to very poor countries. Even in a developing state such as Grenada only twenty per cent of properties were insured at the time of

hurricane Ivan. In countries such as Switzerland, premiums are paid on the value of the building, ignoring exposure to risk- the rate is the same throughout a community. This differs from the UK or the USA, so the exposure to underwriters is uneven throughout the reinsurance world. In Japan where building land is at a premium, different considerations come into play, so it is difficult for developing countries to follow the right role model. Nor indeed is life assurance a global product. Governments may not want to subsidise an insurance programme in areas where they do not want their populations to live.

44. There are three guiding principles. Where there is an opportunity, a momentum for change should be encouraged in disaster response planning. Stakeholder groups should take advantage of local culture, and scientific knowledge on disaster knowledge needs to be freely available to all countries.

#### **Regional co-ordination mechanisms: what improvements can be made?**

45. The examples of ASEAN was discussed in conjunction with the conference to understand the added value of regional mechanisms, to assist national institutional reform and encourage best practice. There were many lessons to be learnt from the Asian Tsunami, especially as regards appropriate roles in training, capacity building and preparedness. For instance, within the ten-country ASEAN block, assimilation teams from Singapore carried out a joint exercise with Indonesia, so that each country now knows what the other can offer. This year there is an ASEAN assimilation exercise in Cambodia to understand the full effects of flooding. Neutral assistance is one of ASEAN's guiding principles. This ethos is managed through bi-annual ASEAN expert group meetings and a regional programme on disaster management, which runs from 2004-2010. Disaster management priorities have been reaffirmed by heads of states and governments. The Tsunami summit of 6<sup>th</sup> January 2005 appreciated the contribution and assistance by countries, governments, NGOs and citizens. It recognised the pivotal role of the UN, the Conference went on to underline the needs to coordinate and ensure affective, sustainable assistance. The ASEAN leaders expressed commitment to assist full recovery through immediate emergency response, mid-term rehabilitation and long-term reconstruction

46. The effect of the Tsunami meant that Asian countries urgently mobilised emergency relief resources and requested the UN to organise the international community's contribution. There was a call to create a global standby arrangement for immediate humanitarian relief efforts. The conference agreed to strengthen coordination to ensure effective and immediate assistance distribution.

47. There was recognition that both military and civilian personnel should work side by side in a disaster. There should be an ASEAN humanitarian assistance centre, disaster information sharing and communication network and capacity building. The resulting conference agreement was codified and signed in July 2005. The text also called for closer and more regular coordination with partners such as UNDAC, INSARAG, USDA/FS and all other UN agencies, as well as with other regional and international NGOs. The agreement was built upon established principles and the body of the text allows for joint military and civilian activity in all ASEAN countries.

48. The proposed disaster response centre within the ASEAN security community plan of action will act as a bank of knowledge as well as a facilitator of emergency equipment and task forces. There will be a communication network with improved early warning and decision-making through electronic links and collaboration with the Pacific disaster centre. It is believed that a new internal drive and international cooperation will continue to provide the momentum. Some member countries increasingly assume prominence as responders and donors on the regional and international scene. Many of the Asia-Pacific UN agency officers are gaining a higher regional profile. The increasing number and scale of disaster will keep the issue high on the world agenda. But there is a need to sustain efforts on prevention and preparedness as governments and people recover from the shock of the Tsunami. Their interest in disaster preparedness must be maintained on a regional level.

49. The ASEAN regional disaster response committee identified a wide range of needs and areas for regional cooperation, as well as an audit of capacities and resources available in 2001. It was realized that regional cooperation was needed to strengthen the national resources in disaster management and enhance the region's capability to improve disaster preparedness and response. There needed to be a regional cooperation body comprising representatives of each national society at the manager level of IFRC and RC. This was the justification for funding the SEA regional disaster management cooperation network.

50. The four main objectives to be to be achieved were:

- i. Support to individual national societies in meeting their development needs in disaster and conflict management.
- ii. That the federation's regional disaster response and response preparedness capacity should strengthen understanding of and linkage to the global response system.
- iii. Improvements to the disaster management information system (DMIS) and the networking and knowledge sharing mechanisms in the region.

- iv. The federation's regional disaster management cooperation framework in SEA should be maintained, sustained and further developed.

51. Standard operating procedures for the RDRT have now been put in place. Emergency response units have been set up on a regional basis that comprise mass water production units, field clinic units, relief distribution units and a logistics unit. A regional crisis management centre has now been established, DMIS a regional database and directory of the RDMC resources and website. A working group was established to follow up on the ASEAN DM agreement of August 2005 and the ASEAN parliamentary declaration on disaster management to coordinate the establishment of the regional training, logistic hub and crisis management centre. The added value of the RDMC to the region has become quite clear. As a body it understands the culture, customs and religions of the region and the individual people, as players know each other well. At present there are trained volunteers from eleven countries who can complement governments during a crisis.

52. The Ministry of Welfare should have the role of conducting damage assessment, especially in outer regions where ministry officials may find it difficult to reach a devastated area. It is essential to disseminate information both to the victims and to the world outside. Training programmes have also helped local volunteers to distribute relief more efficiently. Similar to the role of the British Red Cross, volunteers have become more proficient and useful to the government in camp and shelter management, as well as in tracing missing people. For the Ministry of Health, the volunteers help in the transportation of casualties, first aid, training and manning of temporary mortuaries, the latter being more difficult than in the western world due to the speed with which bodies decompose in the intense heat. In each country there is also a rescue department where the volunteers have been training in search and rescue. The Ministries of Finance have also understood the need for volunteers, since they cut down the cost to governments, saving on the need to employ professional people.

53. There is also cooperation with the private sector, especially from the bigger employers. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the RDMC and are becoming willing partners. Representing the regional airlines, Air Asia has signed an MOU with the Malaysian Red Crescent and are due to be full members of the RDMC. In order to understand and complement each other, ASEAN DM and RDMC are holding joint meetings. They have begun to exchange papers and to organise joint practical exercises, mobilisation programmes and tabletop exercises. They are seeking the benefits of a collaborative mission.

54. The biggest constraints on the RDMC are funding. National governments give where they can to their own organisations, but rarely have enough resources to support a regional body. However RDMC is working alongside ASEAN, so that the respective governments can be aware of regional work, thus encouraging them to make an annual budgetary provision to finance their own national societies' disaster management units as well as RDM and the RDMC. There has been a marked contrast between the successes of emergency planning in Bam, Iran as opposed to the Tsunami efforts. Throughout the effected area of the Tsunami there was too much duplication and a lack of information sharing. Often, decisions were made on a European basis which could not apply to South East Asia. Many inappropriate delegates were sent out to help.

55. One of the notable aspects of the relief efforts following the 2004 Tsunami was the public acknowledgement of the role of logistics in the effective relief. In the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami, as relief goods flooded airports and warehouses in the affected regions, aid agencies struggled to sort through, store and distribute the piles of supplies, while disposing of those that were inappropriate. Due to the enormity of the disaster and the sheer number of organizations that were present, this emergency highlighted the need to leverage resources and coordinate with military, private sector and humanitarian organizations to provide more effective relief.

56. The magnitude of destruction caused by the Tsunami created an unprecedented response from people and organizations around the world. But the environment in which humanitarian organizations normally operate is influenced by the trends in donor spending and priorities. Scarcity of trained and experienced logisticians and high employee turnover create an environment in which there is a lack of institutional learning. With the emerging competition for funding among major relief organizations, the heads of logistics tend to fight their own battles with little collaboration.

### **Lessons from the Asian Tsunami**

57. A recent survey by the Fritz Institute in the Tsunami-affected areas of India and Sri Lanka probed beneficiary perceptions of the effectiveness of aid. Despite vastly different political and economic scenarios, many commonalties existed in both countries, suggesting that rescue and relief activities are relatively similar across contexts. As the majority of rescue and relief actors are local, developing local capacity and preparedness are the key to effective relief. The voice of the afflicted is an important indication of relief effectiveness and those most affected by disasters must be consulted about their priorities and preferences about the type of assistance that is most needed. Lack of logistical capacity created critical

bottlenecks and the perception of 'Dumping'. Both relief content (timing and adequacy) and relief process (distribution methods) are important to effective relief.

58. Governments must play a key role in coordination of relief as disasters are chaotic by definition and require coordination of various actors to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that the most critical assistance is provided to those who most need it. Back-room capacity must be developed to ensure that the supply chains for relief have been appropriately planned and that there is transportation and storage for the supplies that are being mobilized. It is important to think through the mission and its intended outcomes. The challenge is to bring about a smooth, speedy and coordinated response by helping organizations to overcome the blurring of boundaries among the roles assigned to different organizations. Humanitarian organizations recognize the value of utilizing integrated technology systems to capture and analyse information resulting in a more effective and efficient relief effort. It is essential to ensure a proper alignment of resources. Staff should be trained in the field. Performance must be monitored. While hazards are inevitable and elimination of all risks is impossible there are technical measures, traditional measures, traditional practices and publicised experience that can reduce the severity of the disasters.

#### **National and International Military Cooperation: Lessons learnt from recent disasters**

59. The role of the military is different in so many countries. It is important for the military to demonstrate to its own people that it is not a threat and that it is there almost as a branch of civilian relief: not so dissimilar to a non-governmental organisation. The military is often the best-equipped agency of any nation both financially and through constant training of its own personnel. But an army on its own cannot solve all the issues that are created by a natural disaster. All armies should be able to cooperate in their mitigating role internationally, even though charity does begin at home. National service does help to train future volunteers. When they return home, especially in nations as large as India or the Philippines; they form a base of expertise that can connect with the national authorities. The military are capable of being the first contractors to help rebuild communities, shore up riverbanks, open up airports and to help both national and international aid arrive. The military is on duty to help twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. The chairman of the Indian Natural Disaster Relief Programme is the Prime Minister. The head of each state is a vice-chairman who is also the local chairman of the National Institute of National Disaster. This institute encourages preparedness, whether it is against flooding, earthquakes or Snow Tsunamis. The recent Snow Tsunami in Kashmir would have been far worse if the army had not been able to respond so fast, despite the political differences between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. Fortunately the local families were very resilient. It showed that the meticulous training of the military was able to respond to the needs of the civil governments with whom they practice

disaster relief programmes. There was also very good cooperation between the Indian and Pakistan military- the scale of the disaster was enormous- roads and local airfields were totally destroyed. The disaster showed that the Indian Army is a people's army. Its preparedness is helped by virtue of training awareness from the bottom up.

60. Military assistance in natural or complex disasters should always be used if it is there and meets the necessary requirements. The military understands logistics, and has the manpower that can be moved at a moment's notice. Many countries have no other options. The military is very well disciplined and able to respond to civil authority. The military can continue to help a country recover during political changes, which can happen even in mature democratic societies. There is also a need for military officers to meet their counterparts in other regional countries so as to allay fears of invasion or interference in another country's politics. For that reason, ASEAN group meetings must include military dialogue. Nor must the activities of Peace Corps of young adults be overlooked when preparing for disaster relief.

**Conclusion: Improving National and regional disaster response capacity. Turning words into action.**

61. Recent global events have shown that there are many similarities between both natural and man-made disasters. Yet the political will is more apparent in the man-made ones. Even the United Nations concentrates on the immediacy of man's actions rather than on nature's threat to man. Since 9/11, excluding the war in Iraq, no terrorist incident has accounted for more than three hundred casualties. Such casualty figures should be compared with the tens of thousands killed in the earthquakes of Bam, Gujarat, South Asia and the Asian Tsunami.

62. There is an interesting comparison between two UN resolutions that came out shortly after 9/11- one on terrorism and one on the international strategy for disaster reduction. The Resolution on terrorism (1373) states that all states: "Shall prevent and suppress the financing of terrorist acts", and "shall refrain from providing any form of support, active or passive to entities or persons involved in terrorist's acts". It is necessary to compare resolution 1373 with the resolution relating to the international strategy for disaster reduction (56/195) which was issued about the same time (December 2001). This resolution "invites governments and relevant organisations of the United Nations systems to strengthen national participation in the implementation of strategy" and calls upon governments to do a number of things. It uses words such as 'governments are urged to' or 'should'. The resolution might just as well say, 'would you mind awfully if you did this for us?' The words are so undemonstrative that they are unlikely to have an effect on many countries. There

appears to be an imbalance between the UN's approach to terrorism and its approach to disaster management. That imbalance needs to be corrected. One of the reasons for the two separate approaches is that terrorism is seen as more of a threat to existing governments than are disasters or indeed climate change, which effects disasters. The recent Hyogo framework (2005) set no targets for governments to achieve: a reflection of the divergent approaches. Indeed three of the most important countries that affect climate change are not party to the international agreement (USA, China and Australia). Yet each of these nations is affected annually by natural disasters and climate change is a factor.

63. There is a need to have an international set of principles to which all governments and parastatal organisations adhere. All stakeholders should share a common disaster language. A set of principles can help focus crisis managers, thus enabling them to decide what action to take. The principles can act as a mental checklist. This concept was put forward at Wilton Park in 2004 and it was recommended that IFRC and UNOCHA should develop those principles. Perhaps there should be more stakeholders involved in this very good and sound idea.

64. The conference agreed that if disaster management is going to work, it needed the right people. If they are not trained to carry out a plan, it will not work, however good it looks on paper. Just because someone has a management role, it does not mean that he will be an effective leader. There needs to be a better way of selecting and training those who are going to be leaders.

65. There also needs to be a way of learning from history. Our memories ought to be backed up with historical data and practice. Throughout the history of the world we have had natural disasters on both epic and local scales, but even with new technology, we respond in the same way time and time again. One problem is a lack of access to relevant material. If you go into a library, you will see rows upon rows of books explaining how military commanders have fought wars. If you wanted to read about disaster management, you would not find many books at all. Disaster history needs to be recognised as an academic subject. We should encourage disaster managers to record their thoughts and experiences, not just for the benefit of their organisations but also for posterity.

66. Disaster laws need to be clearly defined and recognised throughout the world. They should not be too prescriptive, but act as a loose framework to encourage international action and help. Memorandums of understanding and standard operating procedures are both useful. Disaster management does not stand still and laws should not ossify the process of development. It is easier to change an MOU than a law.

67. There is a need for all those in disaster management to trust each other. This discipline cannot afford people not to share their experiences or knowledge: civilians and military alike. There may be no lack of will but there is often a lack of funds. Governments do not like setting aside monies for preparing for disasters when they have so many current constraints on their expenditure. If nations and peoples are to help themselves, they must have many trained and effective volunteers. This does not mean that villagers alone should have to fund the equipment and the required knowledge. Governments must participate at all times in budgeting for equipment and knowledge. It was heartening to discover the role of women in countries such as Iran, Malaysia and Sub-Saharan Africa where they were part of the decision-making process, which reflected their role in family life and local communities. It is also noticeable that developed countries may have a different attitude to disasters within their own national boundaries than they do in their international donor role.

68. There have been four conferences at Wilton Park on the theme of disasters. Perhaps the next scheduled meeting should look back to the minutes of the previous four and see how many of the recommendations have been implemented. Such an exercise should help to measure progress. Significant natural disasters have helped to fashion necessary disaster management and allowed stakeholders, especially politicians, to understand the need for disaster preparedness and mitigation.

*None of us is as smart as all of us.*

**Robert Lyle**  
**May 2006**

Wilton Park Reports are brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of a conference. The reports reflect rapporteurs' personal interpretations of the proceedings – as such they do not constitute any institutional policy of Wilton Park nor do they necessarily represent the views of rapporteurs.