

Introduction

- 1.1 The Boxing Day 2004 tsunami was one of the worst natural disasters to occur in modern times. Equally unprecedented in scale has been the donor response and the challenges faced by governments and non-government organisations (NGOs) alike, in coordinating both the relief and reconstruction phases of the tsunami response.
- 1.2 Australia has been the second largest country contributor to tsunami aid after the United States,¹ and is playing a major role, particularly in Indonesia, in assisting tsunami-affected communities to rebuild and recover.

Referral

- 1.3 On 9 February 2006, the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (hereafter referred to as the Committee) resolved to undertake a review of the 2004-2005 annual reports of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), focusing specifically on Australia's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

1 K.F. Inderfurth et al, *The Tsunami Report Card*, Foreign Policy Magazine, December 2005, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3314&fp_src=ealert051213

Scope of inquiry

- 1.4 In its 2004-2005 annual report, AusAID states that by 30 June 2005, a total of \$68 million in immediate humanitarian assistance had been committed by the federal government to Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Seychelles, Thailand and India, and that additional reconstruction funds, including the \$1 billion Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development, are progressively being committed against longer-term reconstruction priorities.²
- 1.5 The annual report acknowledges that Australia's assistance has drawn on the flexible relationships which Australia's aid program maintains with implementing partners, including Australian NGOs, who received \$12 million to provide services, supplies and support to tsunami-affected communities, and the United Nations who received \$23.5 million to support its role in providing relief and coordinating the international humanitarian effort.³
- 1.6 By mid-May 2005, Australian NGOs had raised an additional \$313 million in donations from Australian businesses, community groups and private citizens to help tsunami-affected countries recover.⁴
- 1.7 It is now some 18 months since the tsunami occurred. The Committee considered it timely to convene a forum where members could meet with representatives of the Australian NGO aid community and discuss- together with government departments and agencies - where Australians' money is being spent and how aid agencies have delivered and are continuing to deliver assistance to tsunami-affected communities.

Roundtable public hearing

- 1.8 For the inquiry, the Committee invited a range of witnesses to give evidence at and participate in a half-day roundtable discussion with committee members at Parliament House in Canberra on Friday 12 May 2006.

2 AusAID Annual Report 2004-2005, p. 96

3 AusAID Annual Report 2004-2005, p. 96

4 ACFID, *Aussie Donors rebuild lives*, media release, 1 June 2005, http://www.acfid.asn.au/pubs/2005_releases/tsunamireport.htm

- 1.9 The Committee advertised the hearing on its website in order to encourage public participation.
- 1.10 At the hearing, the Chair described the benefits of conducting committee hearings in the roundtable format:
- ...I particularly like using roundtables to discuss some of the key issues this committee works on because it seems to me that they are much more productive than a fairly intense witness interview session process for us. It enables the participants to bounce off each other's ideas as well.⁵
- 1.11 Whilst on this occasion the Committee did not call for written submissions as part of the inquiry process, the Victorian Department of Premier and Government referred the Committee to its website which contains information on Victoria's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami.⁶
- 1.12 Appendix A lists the exhibits supplied by witnesses, further to the roundtable hearing.

Program and participants

- 1.13 Those attending the roundtable included representatives from the five main non-governmental organisations in Australia,⁷ the regional representative from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) and Trade, Defence (ADF) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP).
- 1.14 The roundtable was divided into two sessions. In the first session, the Committee sought an overview of progress to date on Australia's tsunami response and to learn about agencies' current operational priorities. In the second session, the Committee focused on lessons that are emerging, which should inform ongoing responses to recovery requirements in the tsunami-affected countries.
- 1.15 Appendix B contains a copy of the program and list of participants.

5 Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 42

6 See the Department of Premier and Cabinet website for details of projects funded through the Victorian government's \$10 million Tsunami Disaster Reconstruction Fund <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D8000265E1A/page/Listing-Home+Page+News-Victoria%27s+Response+to+Indian+Ocean+Tsunami!OpenDocument>

7 Australian Red Cross, Oxfam Australia, World Vision Australia, CARE Australia and Caritas Australia

Hearing transcript

- 1.16 The public hearing was webcast and broadcast internally on the House Monitoring System. The official Hansard transcript is available from the Committee's website.⁸

Report structure

- 1.17 The report comprises three chapters. This first chapter contains an outline of the inquiry referral and process. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the initial impact of the tsunami and Australia's response. Chapter 3 sets out some of the main issues which were raised and examined at the roundtable.

8 JSCFADT website,
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/tsunamiresponse/hearings.htm>