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HUMAN RIGHTS SUBCOMMITTEE

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Human Rights Subcommittee

Friday, 12 May 2006

Members: Senator Ferguson *(Chair)*, Mr Edwards *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Bartlett, Crossin, Eggleston, Hutchins, Johnston, Kirk, Moore, Payne, Scullion, Stott Despoja and Webber and Mr Baird, Mr Barresi, Mr Danby, Mrs Draper, Mrs Gash, Mr Gibbons, Mr Haase, Mr Hatton, Mr Jull, Mrs Moylan, Mr Prosser, Mr Bruce Scott, Mr Sercombe, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott, Mr Cameron Thompson, Ms Vamvakinou, Mr Wakelin and Mr Wilkie

Human Rights Subcommittee members: Senator Payne *(Chair)*, Ms Vamvakinou *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Bartlett, Ferguson *(ex officio)*, Kirk, Moore and Stott Despoja and Mr Baird, Mr Danby, Mr Edwards *(ex officio)*, Mr Sercombe and Mr Cameron Thompson

Members in attendance: Senators Ferguson, Moore, Payne, Stott Despoja and Webber and Mr Baird, Mr Cameron Thompson and Ms Vamvakinou

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The annual reports of government agencies, in accordance with a schedule presented by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Speaker's schedule lists annual reports from agencies within the Defence and Foreign Affairs portfolios as being available for review by the committee.

On 9 February 2006 the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade resolved to examine the annual reports of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Agency for International Development, focusing specifically on Australia's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

WITNESSES

Subcommittee met at 9.18 am

CHAIR (Senator Payne)—Good morning, ladies and gentlemen; we will get under way. We have a large number of people participating today, and the more time we have the better. I declare open this public roundtable hearing on Australia's response to the Indian Ocean tsunami by the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. On 9 February 2006, the subcommittee resolved to undertake a review of the annual report of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, focusing specifically on Australia's response to the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami. Australia has been the second largest country contributor to tsunami aid after the United States and has played a major role in the relief and reconstruction efforts—particularly in Indonesia, which was closest to the epicentre of the earthquake and suffered the most casualties and physical damage.

I refer to the AusAID annual report, which states that by 30 June 2005, the total of $68 million of immediate humanitarian assistance had been committed to Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the 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.

The annual report also acknowledges that Australia's assistance drew on the flexible relationships 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, which received $23½ million to support its role in providing relief and coordinating the international humanitarian effort. Within a matter of months after the disaster, Australian NGOs had raised an additional $313 million in donations from Australian businesses, community groups and private citizens to help tsunami-affected countries recover.

Now that nearly 18 months have elapsed since the tsunami occurred, the committee considers it timely to reflect on and discuss the Australian aid community's experience in delivering ongoing assistance to the tsunami-affected countries. Australia's response to the tsunami has involved a number of federal and state government departments and agencies and many Australian NGOs. Those agencies and some of the NGOs are represented here today, and the committee is interested to hear your different perspectives on what has been perhaps one of the most challenging humanitarian relief and reconstruction response efforts ever undertaken by the international community.

In the first session this morning, we hope to gain an overview of progress to date and to learn what your current operational priorities are. In the second session, the committee wants to focus on lessons that are emerging, which should inform ongoing responses to recovery requirements in the tsunami-affected countries. I remind witnesses that although today's hearing will take the form of a roundtable discussion, as far as possible, to keep the traffic moving freely, we will direct discussion through the chair. We have held another roundtable relatively recently, discussing the reform of the Commission on Human Rights, and we found it to be a very constructive and positive approach to the discussion—more discursive than didactic, hopefully, and more informal than formal. I would like to start with our first session this morning: progress to date and current operational priorities.

[9.22 am]

ARMITAGE, Mr Miles Robert, Assistant Secretary, Maritime South-East Asia Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

CLEARY, Ms Alison, Oxfam Australia Tsunami Information and Advocacy Coordinator, Oxfam International Tsunami Policy Lead, Oxfam Australia

de GROOT, Mr Jack, Chief Executive Officer, Caritas Australia

EDGECOMBE, Ms Suzanne, Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Section, AusAID

FROST, Ms Jules, Manager for Tsunami Response, World Vision Australia

GLASSER, Dr Robert Daniel, Chief Executive, CARE Australia

HILL, Federal Agent Bruce, Manager, Border, Australian Federal Police

ISBISTER, Mr Jamie, International Programs Manager, Caritas Australia

KENT, Federal Agent Karl, Acting Manager Technical Operations, Australian Federal Police

MOFFITT, Rear Admiral Rowan, AM, RAN, Deputy Chief of Joint Operations, ADF, Department of Defence

O'CALLAGHAN, Mr Paul, Executive Director, Australia Council for International Development

PROCTOR, Mr Murray, Deputy Director General, Asia, AusAID

SPENCE, Ms Jennifer, Acting Director, Australia Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development, AusAID

STAINES, Mr Chris, General Manager, Tsunami Response, Australian Red Cross

TICKNER, Mr Robert, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Red Cross

WRIGHT, Mr David Neill, Regional Representative, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAIR—In moving to session 1, which is on progress to date and current operational priorities of Australia's response to the tsunami, on behalf of the subcommittee—and I thank all of those members who are present here today—I welcome officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Agency for International Development, Defence, the Australian Federal Police and representatives from Australia's NGO community, including the

Australian Council for International Development and four of our largest NGOs—the Red Cross, Oxfam Australia, CARE Australia and Caritas Australia. I think World Vision intends to join us, and UNICEF send their apologies; they have a major function in Sydney today. We are also pleased to have the regional representative from the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, joining us today.

I welcome our witnesses to the table. We do prefer that all evidence be given in public, but should you wish to give evidence in private you may ask to do so and the subcommittee will consider that request. Although the subcommittee does not require evidence to be given under oath, I do advise that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and, therefore, have the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. You have heard me run through the sorts of things the committee is interested in discussing and the issues that have brought us to holding this roundtable. I did mean it when I said we want to keep it as informal as possible, so in opening, unless there are any pressing questions that need to be asked immediately by my colleagues, does anyone wish to make a short opening statement to put in context some of the work they have been doing, bearing in mind we will continue on this part of the discussion—that is, progress to date and current operational priorities—until just after 10.30, or thereabouts, so we need to keep them brief? Dr Glasser is looking very enthusiastic, so I will start with Robert and then we will see if anyone else wants to make a contribution.

Dr Glasser—I would like to make a brief statement which I think will help establish some of the context of the discussion. I am sure that over the course of the morning we will have ample opportunity to discuss in detail the humanitarian efforts of the Australian government, the NGO community and others, and the lessons we have learnt from that, but I would like to make two simple points that help establish the context. Firstly, it is very important to appreciate the remarkable scale of the disaster that struck early in the morning on Boxing Day 2004. A 1,200-kilometre section of the earth's crust shifted under the Indian Ocean, and the earthquake that triggered released stored energy equivalent to over 23,000 Hiroshima bombs. The disaster affected 14 different countries across two continents—indeed, as far west of the epicentre as Somalia. The loss of life was terrible and the destruction across vast areas was absolute—to continue with the analogy, it was like Hiroshima after the bomb—and the scale of the humanitarian response was unprecedented.

The global humanitarian community as it is currently structured was not entirely prepared for this sort of thing. It stretched our capacity to breaking point and, in some cases, beyond. Every aspect of the humanitarian response has to be viewed in the context of the huge scale of this disaster—staffing, coordination, logistics, the timeliness of the response and even assumptions about the funding that was available for our responses. The discussions we will have later today about the lessons learnt and the ongoing construction effort need to fundamentally take the scale of this disaster into account.

Secondly, although natural disasters on that scale have been relatively rare, we need to prepare ourselves for more of these sorts of events in future because the evidence suggests that the frequency, severity and destructiveness of natural disasters is increasing. According to the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance emergency database, the total number of natural disasters reported each year has steadily increased from 78 in 1970 to 348 in 2004. The increase is the result of rises in hydrometeorological disasters—droughts, hurricanes, typhoons and floods—which have been increasing fairly significantly over the last 25 years. As you would expect,

natural geological disasters—volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, landslides and the like—have not been increasing in frequency. This is little comfort for Australia given that our northern neighbours—for example, India and PNG—reside in one of the most geologically active regions on earth.

The increase in natural disasters is due in part to natural variability in climate cycles, but probably also to global warming as a UN report to be released very soon will suggest. Climate modelling in general suggests that warming is going to trigger fiercer hurricanes and more extreme weather conditions, including more severe flooding and drought. At the same time, these events are becoming more destructive because population pressures are forcing people to settle in marginal areas that are more vulnerable to natural disasters. It is important to keep in mind that 85 per cent of the people exposed to earthquakes, tropical cyclones, floods and droughts live in developing countries, so this vulnerability is linked fundamentally to the issue of poverty and development.

The conclusion I reach when I consider these two points is that the international humanitarian system is not adjusting quickly enough to what is becoming an increasingly disaster-prone world. It lacks the capacity to deal with disasters—or, worse, multiple large-scale emergencies—on this scale. I shudder to consider the humanitarian implications if the recent South Asian earthquake had occurred a few weeks or even a month after the Boxing Day tsunami instead of many months later. We would have been absolutely overwhelmed.

It seems to me that there are two urgent areas for attention, and these are to increase our emphasis in aid programming on disaster risk reduction and to strengthen greatly the standing capacity within the international aid community to respond to humanitarian emergencies. With these observations in mind, it is encouraging to see that the new Australian aid white paper includes an initiative to strengthen the emergency response capacity of the aid program and its program partners. In previous emergencies we have certainly found this to be a sensible direction. The importance of this approach was re-emphasised in the light of past events, such as the emergency in Rwanda. There clearly needs to be sufficient investment during the lull between emergencies to maintain and, ideally, strengthen that capacity to respond. The volume and nature of that investment is what seems to me to need careful analysis and must be based on the true learning of lessons such as those we are planning to discuss today. Thank you for the opportunity to meet with committee. I look forward to participating in the discussion.

CHAIR—Thank you. I suppose it is fair to say that, if you combine your rather thought-provoking thesis with the contingencies of man-made disasters, the challenge is multiplied exponentially. Would any of the other witnesses like to make a statement?

Mr Proctor—There are many things to discuss, so I will try to be brief. Clearly, the unprecedented scale of this disaster has had a significant impact on all of us who have been involved with the relief and reconstruction efforts. Today is very important because it is the time to reflect on what has been achieved, what we could have done better and how we can continue to work effectively together in the future for long-term reconstruction.

To briefly recap the events following the disaster, within a week of the tsunami the Minister for Foreign Affairs had made three announcements of Australian aid totalling $60 million in immediate relief. Later, another $8 million was provided for a longer term reconstruction in Sri

Lanka through the ADB and the World Bank. On 5 January $1 billion was pledged for reconstruction and development in Indonesia, which is the single largest aid package in Australia's history. Many others—state governments, the public, NGOs and the private sector—have also contributed massively to the relief effort, again on an unprecedented scale.

The momentum of that response has continued into the reconstruction phase. There remain many difficulties and challenges, of course, in overcoming the reconstruction task before it is complete. Progress is beginning to show as survivors rebuild their lives and their communities. We are now seeing markets functioning again, children back at school and villages and homes being rebuilt. We are particularly proud of the success in Aceh of AusAID's local government and community infrastructure program. This involves a team of 350 people, most of whom are Acehnese and themselves survivors of the tsunami in which many of them lost their families and homes. There is a broad based program to assist with training, identity cards, provision of spatial planning and ways in which people can rebuild. This is all very important, and I will return in a moment to community level endeavours.

Most of AusAID's post-tsunami work is focused on Aceh, where over 800 kilometres of coastline was affected. We are currently have over 200 construction sites, and, while we are pleased with our achievements to date and those of the whole aid community, there is still a lot to be done and some significant difficulties. There are, as people are aware, issues of corruption, lack of materials and the impact of inflation in this area. Obviously, we are closely monitoring the situation and working closely with non-government organisations, particularly in the housing sector, to help speed the reconstruction process.

Of course, the most important test is what we achieve for local communities. It is good to see, however, that Australia's efforts have been noted by other donors, including Eric Morris, who is the UN recovery coordinator for Aceh and Nias. Recently he publicly recognised the value of the flexible and responsive support being given to Aceh by AusAID and the Australian government. There are a lot of lessons for the whole aid community in this response. The clear one is to work at community based approaches. A lot of our assistance is determined in consultation with the community. For instance, we have a process of training over 600 village leaders to help with the planning of village reconstruction and direct access assistance.

Robert Glasser has very eloquently put in front of the committee the big picture issues facing governments, NGOs, forces et cetera in responding to these massive disasters. I would agree with his analysis, and particularly with the need for us to invest more in disaster preparedness in those countries at greatest risk. We are certainly doing so in Indonesia at the moment. There are no safe moments, as you will see from the current potential eruption of Mount Merapi in Java.

It is also worth noting, as Robert has inferred, that the sheer population growth of some countries in the region means that some of their populations double every 25 years. People are moving onto marginal land. Some of the landslides in the Philippines happened in areas known to be dangerous. This is going to continue and there is no easy fix to it. We have to respond well, and better. To finish, we in AusAID are finalising a formal evaluation of AusAID's response to the Indian Ocean tsunami. Today therefore will be very important input to that process. We look forward to today's discussions and hope they will be fruitful for everybody.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Federal Agent Hill—The agency welcomes the opportunity to participate in today's roundtable. Like other government departments and non-government agencies involved in the response to the Boxing Day tsunami, with at least 15,000 Australians initially reported as being in the tsunami affected area, this was the most complex and large-scale disaster the AFP has ever been involved in. The AFP is a member of the Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force convened by DFAT in response to the tsunami and contributed to the Australia's response in the following ways: provision of the disaster victim identification—DVI—expertise and leadership in Thailand and DVI support in Canberra and assistance in locating Australians unaccounted for in the tsunami affected areas. In both cases, the AFP coordinated the Australian police contribution to this disaster response.

As with other incidents affecting Australians overseas, the situation required more resources than one police service could be expected to provide and drew on well-established relationships and protocols between Australian police services and other forensic specialists to address domestic disasters. The AFP liaison officers in Bangkok engaged their counterparts in the Royal Thai Police in offering assistance immediately after the disaster. The Commissioner-General of the Royal Thai Police formally requested that the AFP provide assistance to Thailand in the form of operational and disaster victim identification support.

In relation to DVI, through IDTEF and the invitation from the Thai government, the Australian disaster victim identification specialists, along with other foreign teams, arrived in Thailand on 28 December 2004. The initial Australian team comprised 37 specialists, such as forensic scientists, pathologists, odontologists, family liaison officers and communication and support specialists. This team was ably led by my colleague beside me, Karl Kent. The capacity to rapidly deploy such a multidisciplinary forensic team together with the necessary equipment was made possible by the Australian government funding the AFP to develop a forensic counterterrorism rapid response capacity. This enabled the Australian specialist team to commence their operations immediately upon arrival in Thailand.

The Australian team, drawing on their knowledge from the DVI process established in response to the first Bali bombings in 2002, oversaw the establishment of the Thailand Tsunami Victim Identification Centre. In all, some 35 countries worked together in the TTVI centre to confirm the identity of the deceased. This centre is where the ante-mortem and post-mortem information was collected and use to help identify the deceased. A forward command post was also established in Phuket, which coordinated the activities of the Australian team in the country.

In Australia, the AFP established a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week major incident room in Canberra to coordinate the Australian component of the DVI response. This included staff from missing persons units from all state and territory police. International inquiries were also coordinated through this MIR with the assistance of the AFP extensive international liaison network.

Of the over 5,395 remains of victims unaccounted for following the tsunami, as at 30 June 2005 2,000 had been identified using the TTVI operation. By August 2005, all of the 26 Australians who perished had been formally identified and their remains returned to Australia in accordance with the wishes of their families. Since December 2004, over 310 Australian police and specialists have been deployed to Phuket to assist with the effort. The TTVI centre relocated from Phuket to Bangkok in December 2005. The AFP withdrew from the DVI process in

Thailand on 28 February 2006. The overall control of the TTVI operation was formally handed to the Thai authorities on that date. By 28 February 2006, the TTVI operation had identified 3,007 deceased victims and released those loved ones to their families.

The unprecedented Australian DVI response to the tsunami assisted the Royal Thai Police and the international DVI community in improving disaster response capacity on this scale and achieved a number of significant strategic outcomes. It has demonstrated an effective response to a humanitarian mission, relationship building between representatives from all nations, exchange of technical skills and experience between all nations involved and an enhancement of international mass facility response capability and DVI capacity building within the region. The AFP has taken a lot away from this experience, and the lessons learned have been invaluable. The AFP maintains a rapid response capacity to respond to an emergency situation both domestically and internationally.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Federal Agent Hill. Does anybody else have any brief contributions before we move on to a bit of discussion?

Mr O'Callaghan—I welcome the opportunity, on behalf of the Australia Council for International Development, to come together with the committee. We had 30 Australian member agencies of the Australian Council for International Development actively involved from a very early stage in this response. Going back to Robert Glasser's observation: it was an unprecedented case of a response to such a disaster across so many countries. I think the striking thing at the basic operational level was how quickly it was possible for many of the Australian agencies to get under way in the emergency phase, and afterwards, because they had already established relationships. In some cases, they had been working for 20 or 30 years in particular villages with particular committees and leaders. For example, I can recall in one of the fishing villages in Sri Lanka it meant that within pretty much a week there was an agreement about restoring some fishing boats. In other words, it was possible to get straight into some practical responses.

We also very much welcomed the Australian government's close collaboration with our member agencies and our council. This was one of those instances where Australia Inc., so to speak, really came through. I thought it was, in that sense, very impressive—right through from the emergency phase going forward. I would like to reinforce the comment that Mr Proctor just made regarding the community based approach. That has certainly been the key in all the work of our member agencies because, essentially, doing this in a completely top down way, apart from the immediate survival aspects for survivors, tends to be a very ineffective way of trying to bring communities together again, just as it is in Australia. There are some aspects of this disaster which should not be seen as very different to Australia despite the scale. There is an element in which I think the collective international NGO response was particularly significant, because it was able to tap into the views, opinions and concerns of communities, for example, in order to avoid very badly designed houses that would not be suitable for local circumstances, putting accommodation in the wrong places and so on.

I will not say any more at the moment except to reinforce Mr Glasser's point that it was such a huge scale event over so many countries and it demonstrated that we, as a country, were not in a position to respond very effectively, even though I think the ADF's immediate response was superb. The collective engagement was very good and extremely professional basically but,

when you look at what needed to be done in relation to the situation on the ground, even our input here, together with all those other players, was not quite enough. I would also point out that dealing with multiple layers of government and with communities that had lost leadership—particularly in Aceh, where so many people had been killed, including community leaders—made this very complex.

It does raise the question: what can we do not only before the next major event—and our geologists at the Australian Geological Survey Office say that that particular fault line is likely to have problems in the future—but in the case of multiple events, whether they be natural disasters or in the more conventional setting of human-created political and military conflict? From our perspective there is a real question mark as to how we can expect to deal with events of this kind in the future and what we can do to get our act together in preparation for that.

CHAIR—Thanks, Paul. I would like to move on to discussion. If there are any other brief preliminary comments, please jump in now.

Mr Wright—I should explain why UNHCR, as the refugee agency, is here today.

CHAIR—Always happy to have you here, Neill.

Mr Wright—The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami being a natural disaster, it was not obvious that UNHCR, with its mandate for refugees, would participate in the response. Nevertheless, as Dr Glasser has pointed out, the scale of the death and the population displacement required UNHCR to respond where it had a presence on the ground. This was predominantly in Sri Lanka, where I headed the initial response at the request of the high commissioner; in Indonesia, of course; and in Somalia. That is the justification for our being here today. I hope I will be able to contribute to the discussion this morning.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I made some reference in my opening comments to the amount of funds which were raised, particularly by public contribution, for a number of the NGOs who are represented around the table. There is some ongoing interest from the Australian public as to how that is managed, particularly given the dollar numbers that were being talked about. I know in the regular reporting process that ACFID has been undertaking on the response, for example, that there have been some observations made about the proportion of overhead costs to tsunami revenue, for want of a much better word. I think in 2005, Paul, one of your most recent reports said that it was about 3.3 per cent. Would that be the same sort of figure for other relief efforts? Is that an unusually high or low figure? What is a reasonable sort of level for overhead costs in this sort of context?

Mr O'Callaghan—That is a tricky question.

CHAIR—That is what we are here for.

Mr O'Callaghan—This was the first time that we had such a large-scale collective response—30 agencies immediately becoming engaged on the ground. It was unusual in the sense that the appeal money was almost flowing in before any appeal notices went out. The scale, as you know, rose to nearly $350 million in private donations, apart from government input. So it was a case that was unique from the start. There is probably no comparison point in

that sense. Some of my colleagues from the individual agencies could give you an indication of comparable figures on particular smaller scale disasters.

The picture that you would expect generally would be that for very large agencies with economies of scale involved in something like this there would be relatively low administrative costs, roughly of this kind, and that for some of the smaller specialised agencies—for example, an agency that is focusing on disability groups in communities—their costs are likely to be significantly higher. So the average will not necessarily reflect that diversity. I am sorry to say that we really do not have any comparison. All I can say is that the pledge that was made at the very beginning when we came out in January, in a sense reflecting the public trust that had been bestowed on the non-profit agencies, was a pledge to keep costs as low as possible. The evidence through our four quarterly reports indicate that there has been quite a considerable achievement to that end. Certainly we found that the media became less interested in this issue as the year progressed. I am not saying that this is ever perfect. There will always be complications.

CHAIR—Thank you. Robert.

Mr Tickner—I did not make an opening statement. Robert's report card from school would say, 'Robert is always first off the mark in class and shows great leadership; we are very grateful for that'!

Dr Glasser—Which Robert are you talking about?

Mr Tickner—I might take your card. I would make a couple of observations. I do not want to get into the business of talking about comparative costs between agencies, because one of the great things to come out of this process of joint reporting is some robust discussions between agencies and with ACFID about the issue of overheads. If you look at the ACFID report there is no doubt that by any measure the overhead costs broadly across the agencies are incredibly low. We have a probably a very conservative test for the allocation of costs, which we call the overarching test, which is referred to in the ACFID report. By and large the observation is that people are doing very well in keeping those overheads down.

Having said that, at a forum like this it is good to throw the dead cat into the ring and bounce things around. One of the things I have learned from the experience of the tsunami response—and I do think, if I can be bold, that it is a sectoral lesson—is that one of the greatest challenges we all face is ramping up the capacity for managing big projects. Mr Kuntoro and his team from Indonesia have been saying a similar thing. This is a huge challenge. If I can give a comparison in terms of the Australian Red Cross, I was thinking the other day of challenges that the organisation has confronted in 91 years of its existence. Probably you would rank the First World War and the Second World War and then the tsunami. It is that big.

The point I make is that it is really important for the whole sector and for parliamentarians interested in this area to all sell that message to the public. We can all keep driving the overhead costs down to subliminal levels, but at the end of the day you have got to have top-flight managers with the best project management capacity necessary to be able to drive those projects. We often think of this from a donor perspective, as the question quite correctly and reasonably asked. The other side of the equation is, of course, the beneficiaries, because they want action on the ground. I just finish on this note: as we go on to talk about some of the projects, as we

probably will, we will see that there are huge challenges that we are all aware of, ranging from land to one of our projects being destroyed by local monkeys, literally, in Sri Lanka. There are huge challenges. The key to it all is the planning, the project management and the local involvement.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Robert.

Ms Frost—When the tsunami hit I was based in Washington DC, so perhaps I have a slightly different perspective on what was happening here. I would like to congratulate ACFID and the NGO members for the accountability that was seen in the first quarterly report that came out. At that time I was the Emergency Director in World Vision US and was working with InterAction. I was very impressed with the transparency, the interest that was being generated on the moneys and how it was being reported, and the commitment of the different agencies here to be accountable to one another and make public statements about where and how they would keep their overheads down. Perhaps it is easier with a smaller NGO community here to achieve that; nevertheless, I think it is something to be commended. From World Vision Australia's perspective, we made a public statement to keep our overheads at 10 per cent or less. At the moment we are around three to four per cent. It has taken a lot of work to do that. But I think, as Robert Tickner said, project management is critical to that, and how we stay on top of that is important. Thank you.

Senator FERGUSON—I have a question that is somewhat related to Marise's question. I think it is fair to say that, at the time it hit, the tsunami was on the mind of every Australian because there was nothing else on television, radio or anywhere else. I think it is also fair to say that Australians today regard it as just a historical event and that it is no longer on their minds. But what is sometimes on their minds is whether the money has been spent and where it has gone. A doctor in my small country town—I live in South Australia—twice went to Aceh as a volunteer. After his second visit, he wrote me a very critical letter in which he said there did not appear to be anything happening. He did not really expect anything to be happening on his initial trip because it was only a month or so after the event, but he said he could not see evidence of the money being spent when he went back some months later.

Ninety-five per cent of the $313 million we have spoken about was delivered to the five agencies that are represented here. How much of your portion of that money have you spent? Do you see it as an ongoing program in which the money will be spent over a period of time? What has happened to the federal government's contribution—that is, the $500 million in grants and the $500 million in concessional loans? We have asked departments about that, but not in recent times. I would be interested in your opinion, as agencies working in the field, on what the situation is right now. The only thing I ever get asked by Australians now is, 'What has happened to the money and is it being spent?'

Dr Glasser—That is a very good and perfectly reasonable question. As of the end of the first 12 months, over half of Care Australia's funds have been spent. Paul can comment on the spend rates sector wide. There is an interesting angle on that question that I think we should probably flesh out a bit more, and that is that it would be possible for each of our agencies to spend a huge amount of money very quickly but that would possibly not result in very high-quality outcomes. Similarly, with the Australian aid budget doubling in four years, if AusAID launched into

spending money very quickly it would probably be a cheque-writing exercise rather than sound development.

The chair mentioned the issue of the public's trust, and that has a number of different angles. Firstly, there is the question of whether we are keeping our overheads down—in other words, whether we are making sure not to waste money in that respect. Secondly, overheads are required to ensure proper accountability in the project, which is another key element of the public's trust in an organisation like Care or the other NGOs, so we also want to make sure there is no trade-off on overheads and accountability, which is another element of trust. Thirdly, the impact on the ground is where are all of this comes together. That is why, in all the public meetings ACFID has organised for us, we have emphasised—as, I know, have the minister and others—that this is going to take a long time and we need to do it properly. We do not want to, for example, rebuild homes in areas where there are tidal surges and in the next disaster be back in the same situation. I noticed that, when he went on his first tour of the Cyclone Larry damage, General Cosgrove commented that it was going to take eight years to rebuild. Hopefully it will not take that long.

Senator FERGUSON—You have spent 50 per cent?

Dr Glasser—We had spent 50 per cent by last December.

Senator FERGUSON—That is what I really wanted to know.

Mr O'Callaghan—I think that 46 per cent of total private donations had been spent by December last year, so it would be somewhat higher now. I reinforce the point that it is clear that much more could have been spent on quick but rash spending, but there is obviously a commitment not to do that. Certainly some of the areas in which Australian NGOs have been operating are quite remote and out of the way. I am not sure where your colleague was based. I am not surprised at all that he is immensely frustrated to see how much more remains to be done. But there is a pattern of clear evidence of a move from the emergency phase through to the reconstruction phase in areas like provision of clean water, sanitation, access to health facilities, and the livelihoods of fishermen, farmers and so on. There are a lot of results achieved, but not as much as we had hoped.

CHAIR—We will hear from Caritas and then seek a comment from Oxfam as well.

Mr de Groot—On the senator's question, we would want to affirm too that for Caritas it is around 50 per cent that we have spent till now. There are a number of issues that are not necessarily the tangibles that we have not discussed as yet. With this sort of disaster, particularly when it occurred in Aceh and Sri Lanka, where you have communities who have been going through extraordinary conflict there have been, and will continue to be for probably another decade, huge amounts of trauma that need to be worked through. So the psychosocial program, which is not necessarily for things you can actually see in the way of transitional shelter or clean water being provided, is certainly another area where there is activity.

One of the other things in the program for the agencies, and this was with government partners as well, was the prevention of other disasters happening alongside the tsunami. The outbreak of waterborne disease was a huge threat that could have seen an equal death toll, but certainly a

horrendous toll. That did not happen. So a lot of prevention or mitigation of other things occurring was part of the program. One of the things that Caritas was involved with, and perhaps this comes out of our particular view of the world and interaction with some of our partners, was looking at the spiritual dimension of the needs of communities. So in Aceh, where we had been in partnership with some local NGOs prior to the tsunami, it was the rebuilding of mosques. That is one of the really important things, not solely for the spiritual expression but for the bringing together, for a meeting place for the community and where community is built. So I suppose it is a question of what you look for as part of the conversation that we need to have with the Australian community as well.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Jack.

Ms Cleary—From Oxfam's perspective, in terms of the publicly donated money we have raised, I think we are sitting on about 60 per cent, the spend that we have done. In terms of any Australian government money, we have expended all of that—we took a relatively small amount. There have recently been some challenges for us in our response in Aceh in terms of some ongoing investigations into fraud which have recently been resolved. There are also some increasing concerns we have around the impact of the renewed conflict in Sri Lanka. It is having a huge impact on our ability to respond. Yesterday I had a briefing from our Sri Lanka program and they are saying it is going to increase, so our capacity to respond in Sri Lanka is going to be increasingly hampered by the conflict, and not only by the conflict itself but also by the response to NGOs and INGOs in Sri Lanka as a part of that conflict. We are not quite sure what the impact is going to be, but we think it will take a while to resolve so we have some real concerns about the impact on the response in Sri Lanka.

The investigation that was carried out by the Oxfam staff in Aceh, which I think was reported on last week, uncovered what turned out to be a fairly minimal amount of money, given the context of the amounts of money involved in the response. It has been resolved, but we see it as an indication of some fairly entrenched corruption issues that exist in the context of Indonesia more broadly.

CHAIR—Okay. I will go back to Murray for a response on Senator Ferguson's question, because it had a reference to the Australian government role, before we go to some more questions.

Mr Proctor—I would like to respond in some detail to the senator's question. Could I suggest, though, that housing is such a big issue in itself that, if you are willing, that should be the next topic. I will just try and cover the broad turf before that. There has, of course, been a recurrent reporting process jointly with the NGO community on what the government's funding has been achieving in reconstruction. We will probably see another one of those reports by around July, if not before.

In summary, the Australian government has spent for relief and reconstruction over $220 million in total in North Sumatra. Of this, over $150 million to date has been committed from the billion-dollar initiative the Prime Minister announced, the AIPRD. As you have correctly inferred, the total figure for that initiative is $500 million in grants and $500 million in loans. I will go into what we have done in North Sumatra with that money. I think we take the $500 million in loans off the table in terms of Aceh for two reasons. First, the needs are immediate and

it takes a while to develop major infrastructure loan programs. But, more directly, there is so much grant aid available for reconstruction in North Sumatra that it would be inappropriate, unnecessary and probably unwanted to offer loan funding in that regard. So, as I said, over $150 million of the AIPRD initiative has been committed so far, of which over $55 million has been spent. That ignores the other $73 million for the emergency phase for spending on either defence related activities or other emergency relief activities through AusAID.

In terms of the main spending in that area, there has been an immediate program to restore health and education. We have shared with Germany the role of reconstructing the hospital in Banda Aceh, as well as a range of community clinics. There has been work to help in resuming livelihoods—education and training, including a program of a large number of scholarships for nurses because so many died in the tsunami. There has been spending on temporary shelter assistance, which is the logistics planning et cetera for the reconstruction authority. An amount of $10 million has gone to rebuilding schools in the conflict affected areas—so this is not tsunami related; this is for the peace process also going on in Aceh. An amount of $7 million has gone to regional enterprise development. Australia funded the work through UNDP to rebuild the passenger port into Aceh, for which there was funding of $8 million. There has been some humanitarian food aid of $10 million. As I said, to date, there has been spending of $151 million. That is not the total amount that will go. You would appreciate that some things will be announced jointly by governments the next time they have a formal ministerial meeting. Finally, the issue of housing has vexed everybody. There has been real progress, but it is not as fast as anyone would have liked. It is a very complex issue, as I said. There are perhaps others here who could also speak in detail on that.

CHAIR—We might take up your suggestion and come back to housing in a moment.

Senator WEBBER—My question is along similar lines to Senator Ferguson's but perhaps from a different perspective. Mr O'Callaghan, I was interested in your comment on the similarities to Australian disasters. Last year I was fortunate enough to go to Aceh. It certainly brought back some very strong memories for me about a natural disaster that I had lived through, which was Cyclone Tracy. The half-demolished houses brought back some very eerie memories. So my question is more along the line of how we educate what was a compassionate Australian community about the need to rebuild the capacity of a very traumatised community, rather than rushing in and doing everything straightaway. It is not going to be a sustainable community if we take control of it and decide to build the houses and all the rest of it. How do we re-educate our own people? I guess this is the reverse of Senator Ferguson's approach. I know that in Darwin we were very resentful of people coming up and telling us where we should build our houses and how we should live our lives—and still are.

Mr O'Callaghan—It is terrific to hear you say that. I wish you had said it quite a lot last year, actually, in a sense, because it was one of the things that the Australian media seemed to forget in the first five months of this process—constantly questioning what we were doing, whether we were spending the money quickly enough and why more was not happening and so on. I am not sure that any of them have ever been in a disaster, whether a bushfire disaster or any of the other ones—and we have plenty in Australia. Even three years ago here in Canberra we lost 500 houses, and all of them are still not rebuilt yet.

I am delighted to hear you say that, because the critical element of this is that when you move beyond the immediate provision of clean water and food—immediate survival aspects; Mr de Groot was absolutely right to remind us that tens of thousands of lives were saved by the promptness and the professionalism of that immediate response—without listening to the people who have the primary carriage of the reconstruction, which is the local community and those around them, it will inevitably be not only less than optimal; it will not be very good. In the case of Cyclone Tracy, we had a six- to seven-year reconstruction phase with relatively little spent in the first year and most of it spent in the following five to six years.

Going to your point, I think there is a key difference and that is between those who choose to donate to Australian non-government agencies and others who perhaps do not want to. In this case, we had a phenomenal number of people who had never donated anything to a non-profit agency who suddenly sent in a cheque. There were a whole group of people who did it on trust, and in many cases—I know from my own extended family—people just wanted to know who was the best one to give it to and so on. There was a key trust element in all of that.

For most of the donors there continues to be a belief that, even if they do not know all the details, they are at least getting regular reports from the agencies they have given to. I would emphasise: it is essentially a trust thing connected to a provision of information by the agencies about what is happening. People need to be reassured of that but, in general, I do not think there is a problem with that group.

For the rest of the Australian community, I think there is an issue and that goes to the questioning of the federal government in this matter on an ongoing basis—in other words, for nondonors and taxpayers. The question is: how can they be reassured that things are happening? I think it is crucial in this regard that all of those who are involved, both at the political level and others like us, constantly reinforce that this is not some kind of an instant fix operation and that the Australian experience of disasters—and we have such amazing skills in this area in Australia, professionally, to respond to disasters—is that we continually link it back to the way in which we do this. I do not think it is an easy job to do in the sort of media environment that we live in, where there is constant questioning for instant results, but in a steady way we can try and do that.

Mr Wright—First, let me compliment the committee on the questions already on the table—all very pertinent. In relation to overheads, if you are looking for a benchmark and it helps, UNHCR's alarm bells do not get triggered unless an NGO implementing partner goes over something like 14 per cent, but it is more complex than that. Clearly, the factors that need to be taken into consideration are: are they already on the ground or not—and it costs a great deal to set up and get started if your emergency, as most of them do, takes place where there is nobody on the ground—what are the capacities of the national non-government organisations and how much do they need to be complemented or supplemented by international skills brought in? I think one of the issues that has come out already this morning is the question of expectations. Both the donors and the beneficiaries in this case had huge expectations because in the media you could see the numbers mounting up every day into the millions and billions. How do you manage those expectations?

The third question is very relevant in this regard. The expectations of donors were that somehow when they put money in a tin can or when the government made its pledge it would immediately be spent, but it never is and never should be. There should be, obviously, an

emergency relief phase to keep people alive and to help those most in need, but that has to be followed by a planned reconstruction and development phase that is going to last for several years. I do not think the message was ever passed back that that period of time was going to be measured in years rather than months or weeks, as people at first thought.

In relation to accountability—and I can assure you UNHCR uses the word very carefully; it is held accountable for every cent of every dollar that it spends—I did distribute, for the benefit of the committee, our one-year progress report from the UNHCR. You will see that we have spent something like 60 per cent of the funds made available to us: $20 million out of the $30 million for Indonesia and $10 million out of the $15 million for Sri Lanka. We have overspent in Somalia, but we had to use funds from our operational reserve to do that. Overall, we are over 60 per cent at this stage, and our programs continue in those countries.

On the education of the donors, this in itself is a huge, huge task. As I said, they always have immediate expectations. You need to meet those immediate expectations but you also need to convince them that their money has been well spent, that it has been put to the purpose that they wanted it spent on. This requires expenditure by the actors in order to provide the feedback to satisfy them, and that expenditure by the actors is at the cost of some of the delivery to the beneficiaries. This is not a new dilemma but an ongoing one of accountability and reporting back on how you are spending people's money.

Mr Proctor—I would like to thank Senator Webber for her question. I feel that we are in a balancing act here. On the one hand, you are absolutely right. On the other hand, what I am about to say should not be seen as taking the heat off all of us to make things happen as quickly as possible. We certainly saw, particularly in the Aceh context, challenges at two levels. With individuals and villagers in the areas affected, we have to exercise great patience in a situation where we are asking for their future plans and decisions. We are dealing with people at a time when they have lost family, livelihoods, neighbours, leaders, physical assets and records—in fact, most of the underpinnings of normal life. It is hard to expect people in that situation to have the skills or the ability to focus very quickly on a wide range of planning activities. Nonetheless, as I said, the lesson is clear: you have to work with the communities.

At the same time, particularly for the official aid program, you have to work with governments. There are a few points about that. We are essentially asking a government at a provincial level to plan 110 towns simultaneously. That would be an appalling challenge in Australia, let alone in a developing country—even 10 towns. There is no doubt the Cyclone Tracy example is still current, even with the relocation of people out of the disaster area and the problems that alone can cause.

I want to make two final points, if I can. Governments in these situations can be overwhelmed by us all trying to do exactly the right things. My point in the particular case of Aceh is that there has been a recent devolution in the governance program arrangements in Indonesia that has weakened, in some ways, the strength of the central planning agencies and the strength of those in the provinces. It is not the same agenda we would have run for planning and decision making 10 years ago. On top of this, in Sri Lanka and Aceh in particular, you are dealing with affected areas that are also conflict affected. If you were really trying to find a prescription of a difficult place to aid people after a massive disaster, you would not have done much better than this.

Mr Tickner—A tremendously important positive feature of the first 12 months after the tsunami response in terms of accountability was the fact that, with Mr Downer, ACFID and all of the major agencies, we had a quarterly reporting regime and, after these reports, we then subjected ourselves to any question at all from any comer in the media. Of course, the information is systematically distributed publicly by all of the agencies, as well as ACFID itself. It has been a really important lesson to us in working together and lifting that level of accountability. I want to make one other observation, and it is another dead cat in the ring. Do you know, one of the things that—

Senator WEBBER—You are specialising in them.

Mr Tickner—To all you animal lovers, of which I am one, I am sorry! If I may be allowed a personal reflection, I think it is important to remember that we have to avoid tying ourselves up in process and accountability knots. It is really important to have processes, and our processes are certainly more diligent than at any time in the whole history of the organisation, but with added chains of accountability comes a cost. For instance, sometimes there is a delay in getting people together in committees to have things processed and so on, and that is the price we pay, but I think we have to be conscious of it and drive efficiencies in those internal accountability processes.

CHAIR—I have a question for Admiral Moffitt, which I will come to shortly, and then we will take Murray's suggestion to discuss housing in globo. Mr Baird, you are next.

Mr BAIRD—Firstly, I want to congratulate Care Australia, because I saw the brochure that you put out, which showed comprehensively where the money has been spent and included outlines, photos and so on. If everybody did that it would be excellent. In my electorate and elsewhere there are murmurs to the effect of: 'We gave them a billion dollars and now they are recalling their ambassador,' et cetera. There seems to be resentment about what we did, particularly in Indonesia. Are we working on good-news stories of locals excited about what is happening and moving into their houses, instead of the sad photos that we see of groups huddled in tents who still do not know in what decade they are going to get their housing? As this is the largest amount of aid ever given by Australia, I think it is important to consolidate that and get the good news out to reinforce not only people's views of individual donations but also a broader basis. Secondly, I want to ask about corruption and to what extent that becomes a challenge in the aid process. Finally, undoubtedly we are all trying to emphasise all the good things around accountability and so on that we have done, but what have we learnt during this process and how could we do things differently next time?

CHAIR—Come back during the second session for an answer to your third question, Mr Baird. I suspect either Mr Armitage or Mr Proctor would be keen to answer your first question.

Mr Proctor—It is hard for me to comment on the resentment issue. It is clearly something that parliamentarians in particular are hearing. This is a long-term commitment by government and the Prime Minister to address not only the tsunami but also the cost of the financial crisis in 1997 and the reduction in development in Indonesia. I think we need to see it as part of a very long-term relationship between our countries. I would leave comments on any current diplomatic issues to Mr Armitage.

As to showing people we have achieved things with the money, many things are yet to commence, of course. I mentioned loans earlier: they will have a massive effect on increasing schooling opportunities in various parts of Indonesia, for instance, which no-one is seeing yet because it is not happening quite yet. With regard to your specific question, we have worked quite hard. We have a couple of people working specifically on media information and events to demonstrate to the Australian public what their official ODA is doing in this area. In particular, we worked with channels 9 and 10 on programs at the anniversary of the tsunami—the first on the Maldives and Sri Lanka and the second on the outcomes in Aceh. They were screened on around Boxing Day and I think around 400,000 people in total watched them. So there are some quite strong efforts to get the message out. Perhaps Ms Spence has some more detail on that.

Ms Spence—I was going to make a comment about a specific example of how the Australian aid program is being received on the ground in Aceh. The head of mission, Mr Bill Farmer, visited Aceh on the Tuesday of this week with the Minister for Health of the government of Indonesia. They visited a range of project sites up there, not just Australian government ones. At lunchtime, the head of mission and the minister were met by about 100 local Acehnese staff who are working for the Australian government on community development programs such as our large land-mapping program, which has been able to map about 50,000 parcels of land across 172 villages. As Murray has said, we have trained over 600 village leaders—and over 300 of those leaders are women. They were warmly welcomed on that visit and I understand that the ambassador felt that it went very well. We are pursuing examples like that.

Mr BAIRD—I am sure these are happening, but bringing the story back here is important.

Mr Proctor—It is so hard to capture that in a sound bite or a picture.

Mr BAIRD—That is true. I understand that there are challenges.

Mr Proctor—To try and answer your questions, looking at the physical works, such as seeing people in housing, tells the story. A port now functions again. A hospital now functions better than it did before the tsunami because of all the additional help. Those are the things that people can physically see have come out of the government's aid program.

CHAIR—There is an important role for an event like this and a committee like this as well, so hopefully we can make a contribution in that process—all of us.

Ms Frost—On the good news side, I returned from Aceh on Wednesday, having spent about three weeks up there. I travelled from Banda Aceh down the west coast to Malabu. The fact that I could go by road from Banda Aceh to Lamno in two hours was tremendous. So access to villages is increasing, which enables us to work more effectively on our logistics and our supply chain et cetera, which will help increase the ability to build houses more quickly and to keep our overhead rates down as we will not have to transport things by aircraft et cetera.

One of the good news stories in a rural area called Lamno is that they have doubled their rice production to what it was pre-tsunami. What is fantastic about that is that certain specialists said that, given the salinity increase because of the devastation of the tsunami, they did not expect that to happen for 20 years. That is an absolutely fantastic story. In addition, because of how they are planting now with some technical assistance that has been brought in, they are also able to

plant other crops. There is a chilli crop growing there now that is basically increasing the economy in that village so that the incomes are higher than they ever were. It is difficult to get those stories out, though, when we have the other stories about how people are still in tents. We have to work really hard at telling that story. Thanks for giving me an opportunity to share just one piece of that.

Dr Glasser—I have a very quick contribution. It is ironic that the same factor that motivated Australians to give generously in response to the tsunami—fundamentally the fact that Indonesia is on Australia's doorstep—also makes Australians very sensitive to what happens in Indonesia. For example, during the Schapelle Corby case, we had donors ringing us up saying, 'We want our donation back.' That is similar to what happened when there was a crisis in West Papua. So it is part of the reason why people gave so generously but it is also part of managing the bilateral relationship. It would be very useful if at some point we could talk about the role of the media in emergencies.

CHAIR—We have questions about that. We will. It is on my list as well.

Dr Glasser—Just look at the mine rescue. This is the pattern I have observed: the media focuses on the good news story and the heroics and then the next phase is the criticism of the mistakes. Trying to generate interest in good news stories is very difficult. Unless we can get them beamed into people's homes, they do not have an impact. The same issue applies to why some emergencies get attention in Australia and others do not. It is like pulling teeth to get people to focus on the Darfur crisis in Sudan.

Mr BAIRD—Tell me about it.

Mr CAMERON THOMPSON—In the material that has been provided to committee members there are a series of articles. One caught my eye. I am directing my question at the AusAID or the DFAT people. There is an article from *Foreign Policy* magazine titled, 'The tsunami report card', dated December 2005. It is written by Karl Inderfurth and others. It is an assessment of where we are at. There is a graph which gives the top 10 contributors to tsunami aid, and it separates the private pledges from government pledges. It concerns me a little bit as an Australian government member. I will run through the list in the graph. If you take the US, of $857 million of government money pledged, $813 million has been allocated; Germany, $643 million pledged and $344 million allocated; and the Asian Development Bank, $689 million pledged and $659 million allocated. In Australia's case, of $738 million pledged, only $270 million has, according to this graph and their figures, been allocated. If you run right through the list our position seems very different to the other countries in that our proportion of actually allocated money compared to what we pledged is much lower. Could you tell me if that graph is correct to begin with and, secondly, if so, have we got something different about the way we are doing this that means that ours is different from everyone else's?

Mr Proctor—I have good news—the answer is yes. This was a major commitment, as I said a little while ago, to reconstruction and broader development in Indonesia. So whilst some of the other countries' figures were specifically about, say, Aceh and Sri Lanka, ours was not—it was to be delivered over a fair period. Just like comments earlier, if you are going to use those sorts of funds well, you have to have the time to work out with the partner government what it is you will do and how you will do it.

As of today, my count is that 95 per cent of that $1 billion commitment in Indonesia has been committed. I am not sure exactly what graph you are looking at. I have looked recently at Reuters AlertNet site, which has been looking at relative performance of donors. Unfortunately, as of yesterday, they have renewed the site and I cannot find the chart to give you the address. But the last time I looked, two weeks ago, it showed that, in terms of per capita assistance, Norway and Australia were by far the most generous countries, certainly in government terms and I think in personal contributions. Graphs are all over the place on this, frankly. But the bottom line is, as I said, we have committed almost all of the $1 billion in agreement with the government of Indonesia. Over $150 million of that and more to come has been specifically for Aceh.

Ms Spence—It is important to note that there is what is called a multidonor trust fund in Indonesia for reconstruction in Aceh. The Australian government made a decision not to contribute to that fund. We prefer to do things on a more bilateral basis and more on a community basis, as we have discussed. A lot of the other donors have contributed to that fund. Perhaps that adds to their figures in the sense that they make a one-off payment and that increases their contribution. That is just a point of clarification.

Senator FERGUSON—What you are suggesting is that they have put the money into that fund, but that may not have been spent either?

Ms Spence—That is the case, yes.

CHAIR—Mr Baird reminds me that we need to deal with corruption and media, so that should not take us very long at all! I did want to ask Admiral Moffitt a question, because I think that the ADF has a unique perspective to offer in terms of the immediate response, particularly at two levels: one, your own experience; two, in relation to, as I think Mr O'Callaghan said, the 30 agencies converging on the ground to do various things. Thirdly, when your members are engaged in an operation like this—I do not even think my imagination can stretch to what the experience must be like for those people in a clean-up, for want of another better term, process—what sort of support do they receive and how do they deal with it in the aftermath? There are three questions really, following the Baird style, for you Admiral Moffitt.

Rear Adm. Moffitt—Thanks, Chair. They are interesting questions, all of them, and certainly very interesting dimensions of our engagement. I will characterise the environment a little from our point of view and from a personal observation from a visit that I made to Banda Aceh not long after we first went in. This was a war zone before it became a disaster zone. The comments that we have heard about traumatised populations and what not probably cannot really be overstated.

We were going into a war zone in a foreign sovereign territory. We very deliberately and consciously went in in the first instance being under the command of, you would almost say, and certainly under the protection of the Indonesian military. 'Under command' is not technically correct, but you get the drift of what I am getting it. That was a very tricky set of circumstances. But from our perspective there was no other way to do it. We had to go in demonstrating from the beginning that we relied upon them for protection, as the armed forces of the sovereign country that we were entering, and that we would act in accordance with their wishes. We went in unarmed. Going into a war zone unarmed is a particularly uncomfortable thing for a soldier or

a sailor to be asked to do. However, we were protected magnificently and at no point felt any great concern for the safety of our people from the dimensions of conflict that had existed there prior to our arrival.

The fact that we went in with the express intent of acting on the wishes of the local authorities, who largely were the Indonesian military after the disaster, was a welcome dimension of our approach in the first instance. They were very comfortable with the fact that we subordinated ourselves in terms of military might, if you like, to their wishes, and only did things that they wanted done. We certainly made suggestions about things we were able to do for them should they wish, in ways that they might not necessarily comprehend, depending on the capability that we were taking in. I think that that set the scene for what became a very harmonious engagement for us—in Banda Aceh, particularly, and in the other places that we worked.

In terms of the Australian Defence Force members who actually did the work on the ground, many of them, particularly the medical people, were reservists who volunteered their time very quickly—specialist medical people largely, some with extensive humanitarian assistance and disaster relief experience as reservists. Their contribution was extraordinary and invaluable to the circumstances at the time.

Many of the people here, I know, have been there, and are able to have a comprehension of what this was like. If you have not been there, I do not believe you can have the vaguest comprehension of what this was like. Even experience in Cyclone Tracy would not really prepare you for what this was like. I will take just a moment to describe, in a simple pictorial, how I saw it when I visited. Banda Aceh is a town that is triangular in shape. My estimate is that the north-western boundary of the triangle, which is the sea, is about 15 kilometres. Down each side there is a steep range of hills. The town was divided into four zones. One overriding zone was where damage that had occurred as a consequence of the earthquake. The sort of damage that had occurred there was major concrete bridge structures lifted and moved sideways and tipped; a six-storey hotel building that was now five stories because it collapsed onto itself; and a large mosque, larger in the internal dimension than this, where the roof had completely collapsed internally. There was structural damage from beginning to end across the entire expanse of the town of some 350,000 occupants. Some 20-odd minutes later the tsunami hit.

The other three zones of the town—that bit about one kilometre in from the shore—were utterly flattened. Things were totally removed from there. Entire houses were reduced to concrete slabs—the first floor was on the ground floor. The only things standing were a few of the tens of thousands of palm trees that had been there before. Everything that was lifted up out of that area, including 2½-thousand tonne power generation barges, was deposited in zone 2. As we stood on one occasion looking down at the streets, we could see the damage done to walls up to the top of the window level by a solid wall of debris that had moved through and dumped everything over an area of 1½ or maybe two kilometres. The third zone, the last remaining zone of the town, was unaffected by the tsunami. So there were four very significant parts of damage. Within the first two zones there were tens of thousands of bodies. That should paint a picture for those who have not been there.

The Australian Defence Force members went in to do a number of things, one of which was to assist the clean-up effort. I say ‘assist’ because our media never came close to explaining to the Australian public in any meaningful way what the Indonesians did themselves. What struck me

as much as anything else when I went there was that they did an exceptional amount to help themselves. In comparison with what we did, particularly in the area in which Australian Defence Force members worked physically, they overshadowed our effort phenomenally. When I meet an Indonesian, I never miss an opportunity to congratulate them for that. They were exceptional in spirit and, given the circumstances, their stoicism was unbelievable. That is something we as a nation need to give credit for and recognise much more quickly than we do.

The involvement of our people, however, was largely in two areas: the delivery of medical assistance, which I think has been reasonably well covered, was essential; and the clean-up. ADF men and women in as many numbers as we could contribute—given the force that we put up there—spent long, hot and steamy days cleaning not so much sewers as drains. In a country which is used to torrential rain, these drains were deep, large, wide and of monsoonal capacity, and they were filled with putrid mud full of body parts. It was hot and physical labour with shovels. There is not a person who took part in that who was not profoundly affected by the experience. I suspect that not one of those people would not go back and do it again if the need arose. That is not an ADF characteristic; that is an Australian characteristic. That generated a number of issues we had to deal with. It was psychologically quite traumatising for people—to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the individuals. We confronted some significant challenges there in dealing with our people afterwards. We had a formal process of psychological screening and follow-up support for the Defence Force members who were exposed to all that—as we do for people going into war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. I do not know whether that adequately addresses the three parts of your question, but I think I have touched on all of them.

CHAIR—It did, very well; thank you very much. We will move on to housing. Murray Proctor suggested that housing is a major issue, particularly in terms of current priorities, I suspect. I am happy for anyone, perhaps Caritas, to kick off and then we will continue the discussion.

Mr Isbister—Before moving on to housing I would like to make two quick comments in response to the admiral's comments and while we are still talking about achievements.

CHAIR—You will come to housing, though, won't you?

Mr Isbister—I will move on to housing, Senator. In terms of achievements, I think the relationship between civil and military is substantially better and that was demonstrated in response to the tsunami. That reflects the investment, particularly over the last few years, in a dialogue between the civil sector, international NGOs and the military as to how one coordinates a response to a major disaster. I was in Aceh, in Malabu, in the week after the disaster. I saw the efforts of a lot of the civil and military people, and the Australian military and also the Singaporean military were the key to ensuring that good coordination was happening in those initial weeks. I think that is worth acknowledging.

Another thing I would like to reinforce is that in many ways what is forgotten is what many Acehnese and Indonesians did for themselves. Because I was in Malabu the week after, when very few international people had got to the west coast, I saw the response by so many Indonesians, in particular a very strong network of doctors from Yogyakarta who had got up there and were running the clinic and the hospitals at that time. To be honest, that was what was

saving lives, in that first week when in many ways Acehnese and many Indonesians were responsible for that aspect.

I know we will move on to learnings later, but I think one thing to learn is about that move at times too quickly to make the assumption that local people are not necessarily up to the task and that the international machine has to come in and take over. I saw that demonstrated a number of times. Sometimes it is unavoidable. In many instances I think it was avoidable, but the push to take territory, as often occurs, did override some of that. I just thought I would take the opportunity to mention that. Maybe I will make a comment later on housing.

CHAIR—That was not the deal! Can we start on housing.

Ms Frost—I think we are all aware of some of the significant challenges, one of those being access to sustainable and legal timber. During my most recent visit I think the BRR as well as the international NGOs have come to a pretty solid conclusion—and I am open for other opinions here—that there is very little timber that is accessible that is legal and sustainable. And when I say sustainable I mean that it is being grown on plantation type locations that are then being replanted. As a result, I understand, through informal communication channels, that the BRR is looking to tender a significant bid to import, which perhaps opens up the door for agencies like ours to do that in a more facilitated manner, perhaps by different officials, ports et cetera. I know some of the agencies here have already imported successfully from Australia. With the lack of timber, housing construction in some areas has stopped as we await delivery. That is producing tremendous discouragement among community members when they see their houses half built. So that really is a priority.

One of the other things I noted is that with the BRR now taking on, I believe, the challenge to build 40,000 houses themselves, labour is going to be something that there will be increasing competition for. I think the BRR are looking to some of our agencies to perhaps hire some of our most qualified staff at higher salary scales, which is quite discouraging when they are also a coordinating body. So they are now a competitor and a coordinator. We can understand why they are trying to this, but how do we balance that with the expectations of what we can and cannot achieve?

I will leave that as my opening statement on housing, except for one other point: despite this, I think the agencies here, including World Vision, are making progress. I do not know Australia as well as the States at this moment, but, for instance, in Orange County, California, which is one of the largest counties in the United States, they build 500 houses per year—that is with good infrastructure, appropriate supplies, networks and appropriate business practices—and yet World Vision are trying to build 4,066 houses in Aceh. This is one of the more corrupt areas of the world, and, globally, the construction industry is one of the more corrupt industries. The challenges that provides are something that we need to consider as well.

Mr Tickner—I have a couple of observations. I am confident we have all encountered, in one form or another, challenges with housing projects, whether it is because land is not there as was originally thought or promised or implied, or because of materials issues or high inflationary pressures—a myriad of different complex issues that are pretty well documented everywhere. I want to link the housing issue with a little observation about the future and where we are going with all of this: the challenge for us all is to think that not only have we got to deliver on the

tsunami response, but we also have to think about the things that come out of it. What are the lessons learned? Are we really serious in thinking we have to scale up for another tsunami tomorrow, and how resource realistic is that in terms of managing it? What level of scaling up do we need to have?

If I can recount the international Red Cross experience, increasingly Red Cross is in dialogue with various United Nations agencies to play a leading role in relation to the provision of emergency shelter. That is a very important development. If that is to occur, the need to ramp up the capacity of national societies in the international Red Cross movement is obviously very great. This is an area that interests me a lot. For me, some of the really interesting prospects are the extent to which agencies can start to work with the private sector, the extent to which agencies can interact with new and emerging technology to provide and transport emergency shelter, and, as I said before, dealing with that project management question. These are always going to involve huge logistical and project management challenges.

Ms Cleary—I want to make a quick comment, following on from what Jules has said, about access to sustainable timber and building materials. Very early on in a meeting with NGOs and the Sri Lankan government, Oxfam in Sri Lanka volunteered to source and supply sustainable plantation timber from Australia to Sri Lanka. This was on the back of recognition from the government that they did not have the required supplies of sustainable timber, that it would basically denude what remaining forests there were in Sri Lanka. The upshot of that was that by middle to late last year we had supplied more than 8,000 cubic metres of sustainable plantation pine to Sri Lanka. Oxfam coordinated the distribution of that through a range of INGOs. Oxfam in Aceh has recently negotiated, through the same suppliers in Australia, the second shipment of timber. It is an issue that is of great concern to NGOs in Aceh. It is possible to buy timber in Aceh that is certified as being legal timber. Let us say that informally everybody knows it is not, but you can have all of the documentation that shows that it is. That is an ongoing issue.

The other thing in the context of Aceh—and it also applies to the local economies in southern India and Sri Lanka—is that there is a local inflation rate of almost 40 per cent. The money that was pledged early on and flowed into Aceh early on for reconstruction was based on the economy and needs at the time. What has happened since then is that costs have increased by 40 per cent. As Jules also said earlier, the introduction of BRR as a competitor will mean that inflation, particularly in terms of wages, will go up even more. Oxfam in Aceh is having problems filling some of its positions because of the competition between agencies for staff, in the context of not only the tsunami but ongoing international crises.

Robert Tickner was talking earlier about the need for good staff, and the problem we have is that internationally we do not necessarily have a large enough pool of staff to respond to all the crises that we have to respond to. People are moving in and out, so we are losing knowledge as well. I think in terms of shelter that is quite vital. We will potentially lose the knowledge gained in lessons learnt very early on in terms of transitional shelter, the temporary shelters, as people move through.

Senator FERGUSON—Is the 40 per cent inflation you talked about just local inflation?

Ms Cleary—It is interesting. It is a figure I found this morning. It was presented to Clinton at the end of April at a global consortium meeting at the UN. It was presented to him by the World

Bank in Indonesia. It is not stated if the figure is local. It says that the buying power of incomes will have been either further diminished by rapid inflation of almost 40 per cent. I am assuming from the knowledge I have—I have not actually visited Aceh—that it is not a nationwide inflation rate.

Senator FERGUSON—I did not think their nationwide inflation rate was anywhere near that.

Ms Cleary—No. We are talking about Aceh. It is the impact of the response.

Senator FERGUSON—Do you think the 40 per cent inflation rate is exacerbated by the fact that it is aid money that is being spent there?

Ms Cleary—Yes.

Ms Spence—I can clarify that a little further. My understanding is that the consumer price index in the 12 months to December 2005 increased by 41 per cent. That is mainly attributed to higher transport costs.

CHAIR—In Aceh specifically.

Ms Spence—Yes. The costs of materials and labour have grown.

Dr Glasser—I have many of the same points, but I will relate them back to the point I made in my opening comment about the scale of this disaster. In the case of forestry a study was done by WWF, which suggested you would need four million to eight million cubic metres of sawn timber to rebuild Aceh. That is basically over 400,000 hectares of forest. Essentially, you would have to deforest Aceh to rebuild it, which would not be a very sustainable result, to put it mildly. With housing, we found inflation running at over 50 per cent. It depends where you are building and what sorts of materials you are using. We found the cost of building a house has virtually doubled. Again, this is a reflection of the scale of this crisis and the response to the crisis. It is the same with the issue of staffing. It is because of the complete devastation and the huge international effort involved. Even without that international effort there would be inflation competition. With greater competition the prices are going to go up. When there is competition for scarce resources, whether it is people or materials, the price is going to go up.

Mr Wright—I am grateful to Robert Tickner for drawing us back to the emergency phase as well as to the existing challenges of corruption and the availability of timber, particularly in Aceh. The initial requirement was literally to get people some shelter from monsoon and sun and whatever else the elements will throw at them, and in Sri Lanka the difficulty was really in generating an agreed strategy. The government rapidly asked UNHCR, as they did in Somalia, to take the lead on developing that strategy. It was incredibly challenging to find any agreement on what were considered by the government to be suitable forms of emergency shelter to get people out of the temples and schools where they had been living in appalling conditions. What was suitable transitional shelter? There was clearly going to be a period of time between the day that the tents rotted and the availability of a new house, so there had to be some form of agreed transitional shelter strategy.

And we were dealing with two issues relating to the expectation that those who had been displaced, who had lost their homes, would get a new home. The first issue was the expectation that the new home would start being built the next day. Unfortunately, the development activities and the costs of implementing these activities—planning and implementing them—spread over several years. The second was the protection concerns. One of the most shocking things that I discovered is that all those who had been displaced by the tsunami on the coast of Sri Lanka had lost all their documentation. Not only did they not have an identity card—and we, with the government, had to reissue 120,000 new identity cards so that they had some proof of their identity—but they had lost their property title; they had lost their land title, their deeds.

They had no means of proving that they had owned property which would enable them to seek a new property—probably not along the coastline because there was a deliberate intention not to rebuild on the coastline, which was particularly troublesome for the fishing families. They could not prove that they were entitled to compensation and the issue of compensation is still being fought in Sri Lanka today for all those tens of thousands of families who have been moved out of the coastal strip—where they cannot rebuild and they cannot have their houses back—to some other part of the country in order to be given new housing. So I think the protection aspects of this also need to looked at, as well as the three phases.

Mr Proctor—We are not building houses directly and so I have sat back because it is the NGOs who are really, and necessarily, at the coalface. Just a bit of learning from our end, though, in terms of dealing with the reconstruction authority and the general planning problems: a lot of things were far more complex than any of us assumed in this environment, and of course no one had practice on this scale. Even to have a policy from the Indonesian government on whether you could import timber or not took a little while to sort through.

What we did not know was that a large proportion of people in that area were actually renting, so when you start talking about rebuilding people's houses, who are you rebuilding a dwelling for? Obviously it is for the people who lived in it, but you are actually rebuilding a landlord's property. Even when people owned land—I am obliged to Mr Wright for the example from Sri Lanka, because it is so common—there were no land titles. In fact, there never were land titles, so the community mapping we talked about earlier was, in fact, to get a community to agree who actually owned which block of land.

The other point I wanted to make in that area was that we are now doing more work to assist the reconstruction authority with logistics, using some excellent retired army people, because that is just a terrible challenge to get even physical access because of the cost of transport, as we talked about. So all of those factors, I think, surprised us with their complexity.

The second issue was, of course, the nature of temporary housing. We were flooded with offers, in the months after the tsunami, by producers of good demountable or kit housing in Australia. And We thanked them but, frankly, we were not able to use them because at the time the cost looked so high relative to what any UN agency or local NGO would be able to build a house for. I think we need to revisit that, and that comes into lessons learned, I am sorry, so I will not go into the detail.

CHAIR—I only admonish my colleagues, not the witnesses.

Mr Proctor—It has come up again in a different context, in the Pakistan earthquake. What is it you should do? I think we now need to look again at what was cost-effective in hindsight, with the knowledge of inflation, and what could have maybe been shipped in a bit quicker. In some cases you needed something you could build and unbolt later because you did not know who owned the land. I know the local Red Cross in Indonesia is doing just that.

Finally, the issue we started on with Robert is that this is a scale issue and we need to think in a different way. Possibly, there should be some process between all of us, not just the government agency, where we develop some standard designs for tropical countries and maybe for cold ones like Pakistan and agree on what could be quickly built by industry, bought at a reasonable price and shipped—but that is for the next session.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Murray. I think in parallel there were some quite serious observations made about some of the corruption issues which Mr Baird was concerned about and some areas of that discussion put on the table. I am not sure quite how to progress or how to wrap that up, or whether perhaps DFAT or AusAID wanted to make some comments on the challenges of dealing in an environment where corruption is a significant issue. Then, to launch us into the lessons part of our conversation, we might start with the media, because I suspect that is quite a useful point to start at. Corruption? It is not an offer, just a question!

Mr Proctor—Can I just kick it off. I think others have very direct experience. In a broader relationship with Indonesia, the Australian government is putting a lot of effort into this. Let us be up front—the President of Indonesia has made a personal commitment to address the problems of corruption. He has made a very major statement on this. We are working with people like the Supreme Audit Agency in Indonesia on their assessment of irregularities in the administration of emergency funds, but we are working within the broader sense, of course, of strengthening central government agencies. They have identified problems in the emergency funds run by the Indonesian government. You will see that in the Save the Children, Oxfam and other reports as well. Some of this is just weak accounting systems which lead to funds being unaccounted for. Their agency coordinates recommended steps to improve accountability in inventory and monitoring systems. None of the Australian government's funds are in the funding that was referred to by the Indonesian government reports. We have tended to administer our funds through contractors, UN agencies or NGOs that we trust. It is not surprising, given the scale of the tsunami, that corruption has emerged as an issue. As I said, I think everyone has worked hard to minimise it. The NGOs have done exemplary things in responding to the couple of issues that have come up. I will not go on about our broader efforts. We are doing a lot of work in a range of agencies, in coordination with the World Bank, on corruption in the Indonesian system more broadly. I will now leave that question to others.

Dr Glasser—I have a story from the field. When I was in our care compound in one of the tsunami-affected countries, a military truck drove into the compound. They are not meant to do that. They are meant to park outside, particularly in a conflict-affected environment. We do not want to be perceived to be taking one side or the other. But the gate had been left open and this fellow with an assault rifle on his back got out of the truck and said, 'Please load up our truck with supplies.' This is a fellow with a gun, so what do you do? We have security staff and, in this case, our head of security was a former army fellow who spoke the local language and he went out, scratching his crew cut, and said: 'We can't really do this because your government has told

us that, whatever reason you give, we can't provide supplies to the military. I'm awfully sorry about that.' The fellow shrugged and got back in his truck and drove out and we closed the gate.

This is a daily experience in places like that, and an inexperienced office staff member might have loaded up the truck without even trying to turn the situation around. An inexperienced project staff member might have escalated the matter by immediately calling a meeting of the donors and creating a crisis in the relationship. It is one of those really subtle issues about managing corruption in a place like this. That is something you mention when you get together with a group. Defusing a situation like that, which is going to happen regardless of the central government's best efforts and intentions to prevent corruption, is a really tricky day-to-day issue.

With regard to the comment Alison made about Oxfam's problems with identifying corruption, you could substitute Oxfam with CARE Australia, World Vision or an AusAID funded contractor's name under that heading. Although we are all accredited with systems for managing fraud and every aspect of corruption, no system is perfect so you hope that the systems you have put in place are going to catch the key issues. In this case, Oxfam's system caught something. The only point I want to make is that it is an ongoing challenge. It takes both good systems and very experienced people to manage it effectively.

Mr Tickner—I reiterate all that Robert Glasser has said. I think a high state of vigilance and a very resolute commitment not to have anything to do with corruption is an important part of the armoury of policy. I am able to say, however, that we have not come across major issues—touch wood—and we are going to continue to be vigilant. I will double check with my colleague Chris, but we have not come across any, which is a very good thing. We were asking ourselves why that was the case. I think one of the advantages that we have is that the Australian Red Cross works with the Red Cross Society, or Red Crescent Society, in the country in which we are operating. In Indonesia, the PMI is headed up by a fellow called Mar'ie Muhammad, a former finance minister in Indonesia whose reputation is 'Mr Clean'. We are lucky that we have that very strong local partner on the ground. Eternal vigilance is the order of the day, I think.

Mr Wright—The difficulty with corruption is whether it is institutional or endemic. In some of these places, it was very much institutional. At the time of the tsunami, the President of Sri Lanka set up a parallel structure to take all the institutional fingers out of the pie. There were huge amounts of money and valuable materials arriving through only two access points in Sri Lanka, one being the airport and one being the seaport of Colombo. One of the methods of dealing with the potential for corruption was to track very carefully the flow of cash and the flow of materials into the country and within the country, which was complicated by the LTTE, the government and lots of difficult negotiations. If we are in the lessons learned phase—and I am not sure we are yet, so forgive me if I am straying into it now—

CHAIR—It is imminent.

Mr Wright—One of the questions that all aid actors have to ask themselves is: how much should be implemented directly, given that that reduces the opportunity for corruption, and how much of it should be done indirectly through government institutions or national actors? That balance will depend upon your analysis of the degree of corruption that exists in the place where you are trying to operate.

CHAIR—Maria has been very patiently waiting to ask this question on media, which has been raised in passing by a couple of speakers. We might do that and then use that as a launching pad into lessons learned, because I suspect that, whatever aspect of the discussion we are on, the role of the media is pivotal.

Ms VAMVAKINOU—I will keep it as simple as I can. This issue first came to my attention when I was listening to some of the concerns that were being raised about public perception and accountability. When you all got together to collectively deal with the logistics of what was required and how you as organisations were to be accountable for the incredible amount of money you were getting from the public, did you bank on the media and the role it would play in determining public perception as to how quickly money was spent and where it was being spent? I know that all of you as organisations have wonderful publications and material and can disseminate information, but the general punter—and I often think of people in my electorate who donated for the first time—who does not have any experience with the Red Cross or Oxfam and are not familiar with your literature relies very much on the media for those very quick reports of what is going on. Unfortunately, if the reporting is not accurate or not conducive to what you are doing, it can create a negative impression and you could potentially lose those first-time givers forever. You have talked about disasters being forecast for the future, so you are going to rely considerably on the goodwill of the general population yet again.

What lessons can be learned from the media, and, in your collective approach, is it necessary to look at the media, how it is handled and who handles it? Do you do what they did in Iraq with controlling and embedding people and reporting to the media so that there is some control of the way in which journalists, especially print and TV journalists, get out there and get the pictures out?

Ms Cleary—I just want to link the previous discussion about corruption and the current one about media with Oxfam's experience of the recent fraud investigation in Aceh. There are 12 Oxfams around the world. The thing that we have very much realised is that the Australian media is continuing to be much more interested in the tsunami response than media anywhere else in the world. While I agree with the earlier comment from Senator Ferguson that the attention has shifted, in Australia it is very easy to bring it back, particularly if there is a bad news story.

Ms VAMVAKINOU—That is right. That is the concern.

Ms Cleary—Yes. It is not been easy to get attention on a good news story, but it is on a bad news story. That is a message we have very much had to drive home to our counterparts in other Oxfams. We learnt an interesting lesson during the fraud investigation that happened in March and April, and we made a very early decision to be proactive. We actually went out and identified key journalists internationally to give the story to. The initial media response to that announcement was generally very positive internationally. We got a lot of sympathetic reporting. There was a lot of understanding. We were talking to journalists who had been on the ground throughout the response. They understood what was going on. It was a very positive response.

Last week, the announcement was made about the outcome of the investigation. It turned out that approximately $US29,000 had not been used appropriately, of which $26,000 has been recovered, and 22 staff will be disciplined in one way or another. Some of those staff will face

dismissal. The media coverage from that was 'Oxfam to sack staff'. So it did not matter that we had the earlier proactive response where we got a very sympathetic ear. The follow-up story to that was 'Oxfam to sack staff in Aceh', and that then became the story. We learnt the lesson about going proactive early. We stand by that. We think that was a very good thing to do. We are not quite sure how you deal with the follow-up, because we thought we had done everything right but we still got a bad news story out of it.

Ms Spence—I will give an example of encouraging that proactivity and how we have handled it. We recognised, moving towards the one-year anniversary of the tsunami, that there were going to be some bad news stories, particularly in the area of housing, where you could look at the statistics and say, 'Not a lot has been achieved.' But there were various reasons for that, and people have talked about that and it has been widely documented. One of the approaches we took was to invite a large group of journalists from both the television and print media to come to Aceh before the anniversary and give them full access to our projects on the ground. In that way, they were able to talk to Acehnese staff, our international consultants and our own AusAID staff on the ground and learn about the different aspects of what it means to do development in Aceh in this context.

I was not on that visit, but I remember our DDG came back and said that it was quite interesting and there was some quipping amongst the journalists. There was someone there from the *Women's Weekly*, and one of the print journalists from one of the big newspapers said, 'What are you doing here?' and they started talking about readership. Obviously, the *Women's Weekly* has a huge readership. That taught us a really important thing—that there are a variety of media outlets that you can explore to get that message out.

Obviously there were stories about how we could have done more, but I think it is fair to say—and people would agree—that the media reporting was reasonably balanced at the time of the one-year anniversary, and I think visits like that contribute to it. The only other thing I want to say is that the media is important in Indonesia as well, and I am sorry I did not get to that point when I was talking to your question before. We had 30 Indonesian journalists in Aceh this week accompanying the head of mission and the health minister. It is about working from both sides to get the message out.

CHAIR—Do you know the results of those stories? Is there any report from the mission as to whether that was a positive engagement?

Ms Spence—The information we have to date is that, yes, they were good stories. Obviously the budget came out at the same time, and there were other issues, but the reporting from Aceh was very positive.

Mr Tickner—I am about to say something terribly revolutionary and shocking, but—

Mr Baird interjecting—

Mr Tickner—No, even worse!

CHAIR interjecting—

Mr Tickner—Even worse: 'Ex-politician says something good about media'—and here it comes. I truly think that, by and large, the media coverage has been something we can be reasonably pleased with. Any of us who have had anything to do with government, the public sector or public life know there will always be cases in which we get done over and someone is negligent or simply wants to sensationalise a story. But the big question to ask is: have we managed as best we can our regime of accountability? I think we have done it very well. I pay tribute to ACFID and AusAID, who have worked with us. We have worked collaboratively together in that regime of public reporting and transparency. You cannot do better than having all the major agencies exposing themselves to public questioning from all the members of the press gallery who want to come along and raise issues. I think it is fair to say the media have also played a constructive role in keeping us on the ball and driving our performance. I am not going to go to the bad examples. They are there, but there is also a very positive side and this is it.

CHAIR—Actually I think we postponed this roundtable because ACFID was launching its quarterly report on the date we had previously chosen. We thought it was much better to have clean air, as it were, for both events.

Rear Adm. Moffitt—A number of other speakers have touched on this, but it is a point I think we have learnt from long and fairly bitter experience in dealing with the media—though I would not want to be accused of saying something like 'Defence preaches openness'! As you know, we came out of this with one of our worst peacetime disasters, the crash of the Sea King at Nias. No dimension of that event was ever going to be a good news story. But our general view is that, in dealing with that—and you would be correct in assuming that we spent an enormous amount of time determining how we were going to deal with the media aspects of that and the follow-up—we came out of it with the best that could possibly be achieved: balanced, factual reporting. I think we contributed to that enormously because we gave information to the media before they asked for it. We went out on the front foot with the facts as we knew them to be—and only the facts as we knew them to be—and gave them to the media. Overwhelmingly we got decent, factual, prompt and balanced reporting, and I think the lesson is clear. Going back to the comment I made earlier about the Australian media not making enough out of what the Indonesians themselves were doing up there, I suspect that is because no-one was making the point to them. Had they done so, we would perhaps have had a slightly different media outcome.

Mr de Groot—This will be three in a row: we have had a former politician and Defence preaching openness, and now we are about to have the Catholic Church saying the media did a good job! I think the media did a very good job during the tsunami; it stayed very interested and sought to be informed. I thought it was a lot better than what we as a sector generally feared. It was a good relationship.

Coming back to Dr Glasser's earlier comment about hidden emergencies, it is a very frustrating point for those of us involved in humanitarian response that we have an extraordinary array of needs in our work internationally. There are crises in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur and other parts of the Sudan, and even closer, in our region. The situation for the citizenry of these communities we just cannot get on the media map at all. I have forgotten what the death toll is in the Congo. It is three million or something, but we cannot get the story out. So what was it about the tsunami?

There was a report, which Dr Glasser can talk a little bit more to, done by the Reuters Foundation a couple of years ago in the US, about some of the things that help to get an emergency on the front page and at the front of a bulletin. It is about some of the immediacy issues of Australians on the ground who are impacted. How do we get the stories of Congolese, Zimbabweans or even Southern Highlanders around Mendi in PNG, and what they go through, into the media? The greatest challenges we have in our area of response are the hidden emergencies that they face—the humanitarian imperative that we try to live out and work through but also that our donors expect us to respond to. How do we get the media engaged and owning that issue? I do not know the answer, but certainly something like this is important. It is a pity we do not have a phalanx of media here to have their response on this too, but perhaps that is where we need to be moving as well.

CHAIR—Senator Stott Despoja has some questions on emerging lessons that she wants to pursue, and Senator Moore does as well.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I want to ask some questions of our federal agents on the issue of victim identification. It fits into both parts of today's agenda. I am curious to know about current operational matters, for example, for the AFP and state police agencies that may still be in Thailand. There is also the fact that, to me, what you did and have been doing in that context is a stand-out, amazing, good-news story. It is one that I do not think—and I may be wrong in suggesting this—a lot of Australians are aware of. I am interested first of all in the challenges and the success story but also in some of the issues that the police faced in the victim identification work. That is something that I was able to see, albeit briefly, and have been incredibly impressed by. Looking to the future, as per the chair's direction, I am interested in what we as governments and as nations can do. Indeed, I am curious about NGO involvement, if any, in the issue of victim identification. Robert, I am very conscious of the recommendations, in particular on privacy, that the Red Cross has made in trying to facilitate identification. So I want to look at those future issues and one other that I will throw into the mix. I apologise for this gladbag.

Rear Admiral, you were talking about looking after our own, particularly Defence Force personnel. I was not so worried about the AFP, but I was a bit worried about some of the state police with whom I met in terms of how they were being looked after when they got home. This may be an unfair reflection, but some of the police I met with were taking their holiday leave in order to go to Thailand to do this extraordinary and traumatising work. I was there for a day and I found it overwhelming, but these people were taking off six weeks or whatever it might have been at a time, coming back home and maybe having colleagues saying, 'You have had your leave.' I may be wrong and I may not be quite aware of the specifics, but I am wondering if the federal agency could elaborate. I think that Australia's efforts in response to the tsunami were extraordinary. How can we build on them, and how can we make sure you are resourced for future occurrences?

Federal Agent Kent—I could respond to some of those questions. In the first instance, when we deployed on the 28th, my riding instructions concerned an assessment mission to see how we could contribute to a DVI operation in Thailand, given that the Thais had made a request for assistance. Secondly, we anticipated that we would simply be plugging into a well-established international operation and be playing a part in that, albeit perhaps a small part. I think that was the initial intent.

Upon arriving in Thailand, it was evident that the Thai authorities themselves were at some loss as to how to deal with the situation. There was no lead agency identified. While the minister for the interior was the key contact point and the Royal Thai Police, the Ministry of Justice and local governors had a role, it was difficult to engage a single agency that would point the direction.

To add to that political complexity, a number of foreign nations were arriving with teams that were starting work, looking for their own deceased. After our arrival and probably by 30 December, there were about nine foreign countries trying to commence DVI work with over 100 DVI specialists in country. Within a week, that number had swelled to 30 nations in country with over 400 DVI specialists all trying to do work in an uncoordinated fashion.

There were also significant logistical challenges. The deceased were being recovered from land and sea operations and taken to wats and temples across four separate provinces, separated by significant distances—well over 120 kilometres to the north in Phang Na and over 150 kilometres to the east in Krabi. We made strong recommendations early that we should try to consolidate all the deceased at a single point in Phuket, preferably near the airport—for logistical reasons and to facilitate a more rapid identification—where we could mount a 24/7 operation and have supplies flown in. This was a key efficiency.

However, there were sound cultural and very practical reasons why the Thai government could never agree to do that. The people who lived in the northern provinces were very poor. If we removed all their deceased and loved ones to Phuket, they would be exceptionally worried about going there to collect them. They could not afford to do that. To some of them, that journey would have represented four months salary—as an example—for the whole family. This caused enormous tension within Thailand. While it would have been the best result from an economy of scale perspective, it certainly was not achievable—and certainly the Thai authorities were never going to agree to that.

That meant we had to extend our supply chains across hundreds of kilometres. We had to set up not one but four mortuaries and then supply them with staff and resources. The Thais had also embarked on a process of separating the deceased into two groups: the non-Thai and the Thai. They asked the international group to focus on the non-Thai, while they dealt with the Thai. Of course, from a DVI operation perspective, you want all your information from post-mortem to reside in one site or one information centre so that you can compare all that data with the ante-mortem or prior death information. For us, the degrees of complexity of this operation were unprecedented.

An absolute key initiative was the establishment of a TTVI information centre, where all the data could be centralised, and to convince the Thais of the need to combine into one site the information that they were achieving from what they believed were Thai victims with that of other foreign nationals. That took months to achieve. In the meantime, some of the Thai agencies already were releasing deceased under a different process. I think the achievement finally of being able to identify, with a high degree of confidence, over 3,000 deceased through the TTVI process was an exceptional outcome, given the political, environmental and logistical complexities that existed in Thailand at the time.

At that time, domestically, Thailand was also heading towards an election. There were certain things you simply would not get traction on in terms of influencing, because an election was in process. After the election took place and key players were in position within the government, progress on key critical issues that were affecting us was made more possible and such issues were achieved over time.

Also of interest was that many of the international community who responded sent people but no equipment or operational funding to run the business. Effectively, only three nations were contributing significantly to the operational fund; they were Thailand, Australia and Norway. Other nations who had suffered significant losses, such as Germany, were very slow to commit anything other than people to this operation. For us, that created a significant barrier to maintaining our day-to-day operations. Without the ongoing support of the Australian government and the funding it provided, we would never have achieved the outcomes that were achieved. Enormous thanks go to our colleagues in DFAT for their ability to influence and to maintain that level of support for the operation.

As for lessons learned, at no stage in Thailand did we have a formalised agreement between Australia and Thailand that Australia would lead the operation. It was through influence that we maintained our position as joint chief of staff. While there was a very strong commitment by Thailand for Australia to maintain that role, there was no agreement as such. In effect, that was how we managed the operation. If we were to go through this process again, I think we would seek to establish a more formalised agreement early in the operation. It may have assisted us in achieving our outcomes more effectively as the operation progressed. Having said that, it would have been difficult to do that during this crisis, given the political environment in Thailand at the time.

The movement from what was a critical incident response to a business setting, if you like, became critical. That took a lot longer than we would have hoped for. Again, that was, in part, because it took us a long time to convince other nations to contribute financially to the operational funding of the work. We were able to achieve that only through the establishment of a business plan, which we submitted to those agencies and countries that were engaged; in that way, we convinced them to contribute towards it. That took some months to achieve. We found that challenging because, while you are responding to a crisis, creating a business plan is not at the top of your list of things to do. We hope that a lesson to be learned from this for the future would be that the international community establish some form of fund to enable at least the initial crisis response to take place. Then we would know that funds were available, which all international partners were contributing to, and we would not be doing business plans in the middle of a response. I think that is certainly some key learning.

In terms of the welfare of the officers concerned, there is no doubt that every single person who participated in the identification process was affected by it. But I would say that at the same time there was an enormous sense from those people that they were doing a great service to humanity and that they were driven very strongly by that. I think that is true of all the participants in the DVI community. There were certainly members from some police forces who made the decision that they were prepared to take personal leave to contribute to the operation. I would add that there were many private practitioners in the health industry—forensic dentists, forensic pathologists and others—who were also taking leave of their practices and the like to participate in this because they believed in its significance. I think Australia owes an enormous

debt to that whole community because of their willingness to participate and contribute to such a humanitarian response. But I think they also take a lot personally out of their contribution.

In terms of the management of welfare of people upon their return, we had some experience with this in Bali. A lot of the state agencies, the state police agencies in particular, insisted that they maintain the responsibility for the welfare of their people once they were back in country, rather than the AFP taking ownership of that. What we did maintain was our duty of care responsibilities in country, and we had police chaplains provided from a number of jurisdictions as well as our own organisational psychs who paid regular visits. I think both were highly effective. The chaplains in particular were extraordinary because they actually deployed and worked with the teams in the mortuaries. That served to gain the trust of those who were engaged in the work and I believe that that was critical in managing the welfare of those individuals.

There were also some key ceremonies, particularly after the first contingent, which were held at Patong Beach and gave people the opportunity to grieve. Those who had actually responded had the opportunity to grieve and to have some release before they returned to their families and to what would be considered their normal lives. I think it was extremely valuable to go through that process, rather than stoically pretending that no-one had any emotion associated with this and sending them back home. I think that was absolutely critical.

Mr Tickner—I would like to compliment the AFP presentation—and I am sure I can speak for all of us. It was a very thoughtful and visionary approach to a hugely sensitive question. You are quite right, and it is something I think we all know: for people to be able to identify their loves ones and carry out the grieving process is a very important dimension in the aftermath of a disaster.

The issue you raise about looking at some future fund or arrangements to facilitate this is one we also find very interesting. I just want to plant the seed of an idea at the moment because time will not permit any great discussion of it. A very interesting project of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, supported by AusAID, is a project involving an examination of international disaster response laws. You need to be quite courageous to enter this field because it is incredibly complex. As you can imagine, every country has its own constraints, its own limitations, its own barriers to entry and its own requirements. To try and get some progress in the reform here is a very difficult task indeed. However, for all the reasons we acknowledged at the beginning, it is not a task we can shy away from. To get information for the members of the committee about this project would be quite useful.

Senator Stott Despoja reminded me to place on record that there is a reform taking place in relation to privacy legislation. In broad terms an IDC worked on the challenging question of the ability of agencies to be able to pass information to each other and to not-for-profit or non-government organisations working in the aftermath of a disaster. There was also, I think, a Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry. As a result of that collective work there are, I understand, amendments to legislation happening in the immediate future which would facilitate the transmission of that information in the extreme circumstances of a major disaster. That is a very welcome reform, too.

Senator MOORE—I am finding my head spinning with so many figures. I have one specific question which has come out of some of the work I have done with the UNIFEM network. In some of the public presentations we have had we have had quite graphic discussion, amidst all the other stories of tragedy and need, about issues surrounding women directly after the initial crisis and then in the months after with dislocation—quite specific issues of violence and attacks on women, and also the special facilities that are needed by women as they are trying to rebuild.

I note in the report on Sri Lanka that a couple of the NGOs that were involved there are mentioned—Marie Stopes and Ozcare—but in the other areas there is no particular mention of that. It could well be that amidst everything else it was not itemised. I know that through the UNIFEM process it is something we are following up on. It is all linked to the cultural rebuilding and the things that you were talking about before. Is there anything that can be put on record about the response to those particular issues?

Mr Proctor—This is a very important issue for AusAID. You mentioned Sri Lanka. In Aceh various things happened at various times. One of the very early moves was to put some funding in for the protection of children in that massive dislocation. Longer term, certainly the Australian government is working within the cultural and legal context of Aceh to involve and empower women in reconstruction. I mentioned that 600 village leaders are being trained. Over half of those are women. There is no simple answer to your question, I am afraid, but at various times and in various ways we, and I am sure the NGOs, have addressed this issue.

Ms Cleary—Three months after the disaster Oxfam released a report internationally on the impact on women of the response. I do not have it with me, but I can supply it to the committee if you are interested. We are doing ongoing follow-up research, which is not yet published, on that. It was a challenge, because one of the visions or the impetus behind Oxfam's response and that of many other NGOs was to build back better—reconstruction plus building back better. In many situations, particularly in communities in Aceh and Sri Lanka, that meant challenging some pre-existing gender stereotypes. Oxfam in all of its cash-for-work and livelihoods programs targets women extensively. Oxfam Australia's livelihoods programs in India are specifically focused on women—27,000 families.

In Sri Lanka and in Aceh we insisted that women got equal pay for equal work. It was a challenge in many communities, but it was something that we stood by. It continues to be an issue, because you are challenging existing cultural parameters and cultural structures at a time when you are also trying to rebuild communities. So you need to do that very sensitively.

From Oxfam's perspective, it is certainly something that we are very aware of. Similarly to AusAID's community work, we always identify women leaders in the community—we work specifically with women—but you also need to recognise the context in which you are working. It is certainly uppermost in our mind. It is one of the key areas that Oxfam works in. It is mainstreamed, if you want the jargon—gender is mainstreamed into our work, so it is always a focus.

Mr Wright—I cannot comment specifically on Indonesia, but certainly in Sri Lanka this was an issue. It always is when populations are displaced and put together in too close a proximity without security; where members of the family have been lost, particularly husbands, then women and children become particularly vulnerable. The existing programs at the time of the

tsunami were very useful in Sri Lanka in providing a response in terms of informing people about the risks of sexual and gender-based violence, providing counselling for those who had been abused and providing support for widows and orphans. That is an ongoing program and UNHCR has been working with UNICEF on that for many years. I cannot comment on Indonesia. If you would like information from the UN on that, I will gladly take it on notice.

Mr de Groot—We were also involved in some of the mosque refurbishment and rehousing that was mentioned earlier. With Oxfam and Caritas agencies, for the first time there was provision of sanitation facilities for women at those mosques. Coming back to Alison's point about gender stereotypes, quite a huge immediate issue in Sri Lanka was livelihood, and we were involved with a livelihood program within about four weeks. It was about the re-establishment of schooling, and the focus was on the provision of sewing machines to the women's groups who had lost all of that so that they could sew school uniforms. There was a whole re-engagement with the women directly and primarily so that they would take the lead in re-establishing some normality in the community life around education and other areas of income generation. It is quite reflective that it is not actually front and centre in our reporting. It is something we need to be a little bit more deliberate about, but there are stories on it.

Dr Glasser—I saw some figures when I was in Aceh shortly after the tsunami. It was some survey work that CARE had done in some villages, which showed that something like 80 per cent of the women had not survived, but a significant percentage of the men had. The reason was when the warning came, the men ran and the women ran to get their kids. That was the fundamental reason for that. If you picture that, it is awesomely painful even to think about. Over 70 per cent of poor people in the world are women, and the approach certainly all of the major NGOs take is that is a fundamental part of addressing poverty, and in some ways maybe we do not talk about it enough.

In the case of Indonesia, it would be impossible to do our work without focusing on the needs of women. We simply could not even have a consultation on health care—you certainly could not have a man in a developing Muslim society sitting at a table with a woman asking: 'What do you want? What do you need?' All of that process needs to be focused on the needs of women who are best informed and able to lead the response. Also, the way our organisations interact with those women means we have to have women working with us as well, and the whole design of the project is focused on that. It is immensely important, and it is immensely and particularly important in post conflict environments where it has been demonstrated time and time again the fundamental role women play in resolving conflict and building peace.

Mr Isbister—Particularly in Aceh, it is a particularly difficult dynamic and a very sensitive issue to be looking at how you most effectively acknowledged the voice and support for women. A lesson learnt by a number of the agencies within a few months of the disaster had to do with the huge cash for work programs going on. In the main, it was putting a lot of cash into men's hands and there were significant implications with that—power balances, decision-making that was happening in the community and family—and a lot of thinking had to go into how livelihood opportunities and support for women could be better targeted so they could be very much a part of the reconstruction in a holistic sense. That is one of the lessons learnt that certainly came out of the disaster, particularly considering the size of the cash for work programs that were going on.

Mr Proctor—It is reasonably easy to find all kinds of reasons to worry and despair, but if I can come to the other side of the coin there are two things I want to mention. Firstly, in our land mapping, which I have mentioned a couple of times, previously only men's names were listed, but now women are listed on the maps as owners of land. The other thing—and this is a challenge in itself—is that a mini baby-boom is going on in Aceh. That is good news in terms of community repair, but it also means there are additional challenges for services for women. We—and, I am sure, many others—are working on that at the moment.

CHAIR—That is interesting. I had not thought about that.

Senator MOORE—I want to know whether there is any counselling about post-tsunami violence on women. You can never be absolutely accurate on these issues, but the information we have had is that some of that baby-boom was not actually voluntary. I would like to know about the counselling that is available for women who have gone through the violence of the tsunami—possibly losing their families—and have then been forced to go through reproduction. We have to look at those things as well. I am looking at the counselling aspects. I will put that question on notice and people can go ahead and have a look at it. It has been identified as a significant issue. In the report on Sri Lanka, particular NGOs are mentioned as having that role—but not in Aceh. It could just be that it has not been identified.

Mr Proctor—I appreciate your concern about the nature of these things, but I do not really have a good answer to that. We have been funding an NGO to work in Aceh to help build up capacity for counselling in general. We are also having discussions with the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance on servicing women better in some of the areas you have mentioned.

CHAIR—I want to go back to some of the comments made this morning in introductory remarks by a number of speakers—initially, Dr Glasser, Paul O'Callaghan and Robert Tickner—about whether in some ways the larger challenges lie in the future. Robert Glasser said that both the scale and frequency of these events is changing—and that is empirically recorded—and that the international community is having some challenges adjusting quickly enough to those changes. I think Paul O'Callaghan also made reference along those lines to dealing with major events and the ongoing processes simultaneously and how to get to a point where we can get our act together fast enough to do that. Robert Tickner, from the Red Cross, referred to the challenge of ramping up capacity for managing massive projects in disasters. I am interested in getting responses from around the room on where that takes us in the future, for both government and non-government organisations, and what thought is being given to that even now.

Ms Frost—Perhaps I can start by speaking to the issue of the humanitarian community being stretched. Before the tsunami occurred, the major actors in the humanitarian community had already identified that we were stretched. They knew that if another major disaster occurred we were going to be in a difficult situation—and, in fact, that is what has happened. Several of the agencies represented here today have developed an international working group through which the heads of the different international relief and development organisations—the relief part of those organisations—work together to identify some of the key challenges and areas where we could work better together than individually. Humanitarian staffing capacity was one of the challenges they identified. The Gates Foundation has given resources over a three-year period to look at that.

It is not enough to be looking at it just with that amount of resource. So how can the various government give support, how do we further develop our capacity and how do we also increase the professionalism? There are a lot of people who are committed and who would like to volunteer, but what we are also trying to educate people about is that there are certain skills and professional attributes that people need when they come into this environment. I know Clinton has launched the five-point review, and professionalism is one of the aspects in looking at the capacity as well. InterAction, a body which is the same as ACFID, is looking at that and I am wondering how we here might be able to engage in that as well.

Mr Wright—The United Nations, at about the time of the UN summit last year, came together to try and strengthen the international community's response on internal displacement. They came up with a collaborative approach that involves the international federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, NGOs, InterAction, the International Organisation for Migration and many other actors, and there are clearly still gaps in how the international community can effectively respond to both natural disasters and other forms of emergency. The agreement that was reached set up a thing called the cluster approach—it is jargon; it just means that one particular agency or a group of agencies takes a very active role and also becomes the provider of last resort for certain sectors. In the case of UNHCR, it accepted this role for the protection sector, for camp management coordination and for emergency shelter for internally displaced persons who were displaced by conflict or persecution rather than by natural disasters. But, nevertheless, it is a means of strengthening the international community's response. Many countries have made available, through stand-by arrangements like the protection capacity or PROCAP project led by OCHA, the sorts of skills needed to be able to respond more effectively in future. That includes, of course, the Australian government.

The only other point I would make at this stage is to do with money. Inevitably, without money you cannot respond. The central emergency revolving fund, which was the source that would enable international actors to get immediate funding rather than waiting for pledges to become realities and spendable cash, has been strengthened. Many countries, including Australia, have contributed to the strengthening of that fund so that it is more able to actively support the initial response in future emergencies.

Mr Tickner—Chair, I have a personal time constraint—I have to scoot off, if you can excuse me—but I would like to make some final comments. First of all, I make the observation that the diversity between the agencies is, I think, one of our strengths. We do not want some homogenous, monolithic response. I think there are some strengths in that diversity, and it is very important to put that on the record. That is not to say that we cannot coordinate better and so on; that is obviously a great challenge. Secondly, for our part, Australian Red Cross saw the emergency response units that came into that region—the field hospitals, the water sanitation, communications and other emergency units—from the international Red Cross movement to be one of the very positive features of that initial response, not without challenges but a critical part of the response. We are committed to developing our own emergency response capacity.

Thirdly, the international disaster response law reforms are obviously a longer term part of the agenda, but they are very important. Fourthly, lifting the capacity of our organisations is critical. My point is not that we are going to face a tsunami every week or year, thankfully—and hopefully never—but the fact is that in our region there are going to be a lot more disasters. I think we can do a whole lot more by building our capacity. We in Australian Red Cross want to

reach out to the wider Australian community, to our supporters and a whole range of professions in order to build our volunteer base in the case of external emergencies, as we have for domestic emergencies.

We also think we can do a whole lot more in boosting the disaster preparedness of countries in our region and of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies that we work with. As important as the commitment is by AusAID to strengthening the capacity of governments generally, what is also important is building the capacity and institutions of civil society in relation not just to development generally but specifically to preparedness for disasters and a capacity to respond to disasters. Those are the main things I want to raise. Thank you very much for your time and thanks for this great initiative—it has been terrific.

CHAIR—Thanks, Robert. Admiral Moffitt, in terms of building disaster preparedness, I know that the ADF has quite extensive relationships with regional forces across a whole range of areas. What, if any, proportion of that is the humanitarian engagement on what local, regional defence forces might do in their own backyards as well?

Rear Adm. Moffitt—Any engagement that is specific to disaster relief and humanitarian assistance is probably coincidental—like our own expertise is probably coincidental.

CHAIR—I think it is moving fast, beyond.

Rear Adm. Moffitt—That is right. We can do what we do in a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief sense because we are equipped and prepared to do a whole bunch of other things that are directly applicable. That is the nature of the relationships, I guess, that we have in the region. But what it does do, which is of probably even more utility when we actually get to go and do these things, is that, by the very nature of the sort of day-to-day peacetime activities that we engage other nations' defence forces in, we build a degree of understanding of the people and the cultures when we then need to go and engage with them. I think, as I have been listening here, that probably one of the more significant lessons for us, one that we have learned not necessarily from doing what we do but from watching how others do what we do, is that the degree of sensitivity Australians—certainly I am talking about Australian servicemen but also Australians more generally—show when they go into these circumstances is one of the great assets that we take with us. It comes from a very simple stepping-off point. It is a dialogue, I guess, that you have. Certainly in respect of the tsunami and Aceh in particular, our approach as a nation was: we are desperate to help; how can we do that?

With some nations the dialogue was very different. It was: 'I'm going to help and this is how.' I will give you a 'for instance'. One of the militaries working around Banda Aceh had some tremendous medical facilities and did some wonderful things in the immediate aftermath, particularly the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief stuff. That phase did not last all that long. But the people, the skills base, the equipment and the assets, stayed there for some considerable time, and they got terribly bored and went out and found work. You often find, without a degree of sensitivity to the feelings and the wishes of the people that you are dealing with, that you generate effects that are quite contrary to what you are seeking to achieve. In this case, this group of people became known amongst the local medical people as the 'body snatchers'. They would go ashore and get people who needed totally discretionary medical assistance with some of the amazing equipment they had available at that time which people

there had never seen and would never see again. They would take people back to their facility, do the medical treatment and return them to the community. The local medical people were horrified because they knew that, having been exposed to some of these amazing Western technologies that they were never going to see again, these people would be pointing the finger of scorn at what was available to them, not only in a medical sense but in a government sense. It was a source—even though perhaps small and localised—of very distinct discomfort for the locals.

There are many other examples of those sorts of fine-pointed cultural sensitivities. I will just leave you with one other which I think speaks volumes. It was hot, nasty, unpleasant, sweaty and all the rest of it and very heavy physical work that was going on. There was the story of a young Australian female soldier driving a bulldozer in these circumstances. She had been working in a T-shirt. Having made observations of what was going on around her, she stopped, went and covered her arms and covered her head, got back on the bulldozer and got back to work. The impact that made on the local people who saw her do that was enormous. Just that one tiny recognition of a cultural sensitivity did wonders, whereas an equally tiny disregard for local sensitivities can do powerful damage. I think that is one of the most significant lessons that can come out of some of the things that we have been hearing today.

Mr O'Callaghan—On capacity issues, there are others who can speak about that, but I want to come back to the issue that Senator Ferguson and Senator Webber have raised that is really at the heart of this phenomenal generosity that came from the Australian community in this instance, and I think will happen again. People do, a year down the track, want to know: was it worth it? Would I do this again? They do not need to know the details, but was it worth it? This comes right into this issue, I think, of what can we do better in learning from this experience as players in this, knowing that we cannot shape the whole agenda. It seems to me there are three aspects of it. One is that, given we have such a positive disposition from within our community to want to assist, we can do a better job between government agencies, including ministers and parliamentarians, and a range of our agencies to help initially imprint on the minds of all of those recipients of media comments that this will not be a simple process.

We tried this time and we had some effect, but in that first three months it was still a remarkably narrow view, a sort of traditional view that we saw emerge. It seems to me that there is scope for us—and I am thinking particularly here between government and the NGO sector in collaboration with some of the international players—to be able to very quickly do something jointly: talking heads right at the beginning saying pretty much the same thing, an agreed line. That is not to say that we did not have anything like that, but it did not come together in quite that way with the tsunami, even though we did do joint reporting and some joint statements. I think there is real scope for that and that is right at the beginning. What I propose is not too difficult to do, although it has to happen in a really timely way.

The second thing is the middle phase, which we were in during last year. Essentially the reason I that the most negative media aspects became positive in the second half of the year was that we really did get out on the front foot together and we kept sending them information and we replied to all the queries. I guess 90 per cent of all the phone calls I had were about accountability and not anything else. People wanted to know: was this industry code of conduct any good; what did it really mean? But in providing that information it seems to me that, again, collaboratively we could do a better job in the middle phase. This does not mean presenting our

work as all good news. Of course it is not all good news. We are dealing with some of the most corrupt countries in the world. We are dealing with huge logistical challenges. We are dealing with community level activities. Of course it will not be simple. But I think we could actually do a little better in that regard.

The third thing is that as we get to the wind-down phase—I guess that is where Senator Ferguson was heading—we need to somehow make sure that we are not just getting back to the donors who are receiving direct reports from these member agencies on the NGO side but somehow making sure that people like that doctor in Adelaide are saying, 'Yeah, well, I don't know the whole thing, but overall, yes, they definitely did achieve some things.' We do not have that. We definitely do not have it right across the country. I do my own taxidriver surveys and there is a lot of positive reaction about NGOs, but we did not quite get there. I think we can do much better.

That then brings me to what we call the hidden disaster issue. Maybe out of this we can draw something as a lesson practically, and not just wait until the next big disaster happens. There is this phenomenal generosity in Australia. We are the highest per capita contributor in the world to this disaster. We have the second highest proportion of per capita giving as private citizens for poverty eradication in the world. I am glad to say we are the only country in the world that did a consolidated NGO public accounting exercise in the whole thing—going back to the public trust issue. I do not have an instant solution for it, but between government and us, and involving parliamentarians in different ways, we have to get this hidden disaster agenda moving. It is not something we can just crunch with the media; we have to think about ways to collaboratively put some of these other huge disasters on the agenda, not just when they pop up on odd occasions. So that is that issue.

We have not even mentioned pandemics. People have stopped talking about avian flu, to some extent, but if we found ourselves in a situation like that, these difficult issues would arise again. I would add only one other thought, and that is about civil-military cooperation. We have tremendous goodwill at senior levels of the ADF and in the NGO sector on civil military cooperation. We participate in a number of training activities. We have a generally good dialogue, but to me we simply do not have enough understanding of one another throughout the NGO sector of how the forces operate and vice versa. That is something we need to do jointly in our own way.

Mr Proctor—I have four quick points. I am focusing particularly on the fact that AusAID, through the white paper the minister has announced, has committed to enhancing its humanitarian responsibilities next time round—this is the immediate emergency phase—more than longer term. There is still more to be done on whole of government. I think Australia works pretty well on a whole-of-government basis. The best thing that happened in the first week after the tsunami was joint operations from Defence placing one of their people in our office to work with us on joint planning. It was immensely helpful. Secondly, you can respond with good aid and interventions when you have long-term relationships already set up, and that is everything from NGOs and the UN down to having some exceptional little NGOs such as SurfAid, which happened to be in north Sumatra. That was set up by some doctors, who were excellent, and volunteer teachers 30 years ago—who happened to teach half of the Maldives cabinet, it turns out. You can have links and go back in and help.

We are overwhelmed every time by public offers. We had thousands of medical people and 10,000 general volunteers. Most of them had no language skills relevant to any of the areas. There were immensely good-hearted donations of stuff and time. We have to deal with it better. People would rightly get affronted if they thought they were just being dispatched. So that is a big challenge for all of us. Finally, the communication and information management side is enormous. What is rapid and effective? Paul has touched on all of it. How do we deal with each other well? We are pre-positioned to do so and to get good outcomes. This ranges across UN, Defence and AusAID—and Emergency Management Australia needs a mention. All of those things will be looked at in the next few months in AusAID's review of how it operates, but obviously in discussion with all our partners.

CHAIR—A couple of my colleagues have asked for responses to questions on notice—an unusually small amount, so we should all be very grateful for that—which is an indication of the value of the exchange, and the amount of information we have been able to elicit around the table. I confess that 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. We are particularly appreciative of the contribution from both the non-government organisations and the government agencies around the table in making this work and making it productive. We do make a report to the parliament, it does go on the record, it is recorded by Hansard—so the information does not just disappear into the ether. I want to thank everyone very much for coming. I also want to thank my colleagues. It is the end of budget week. To have as many of these guys here this morning as we have is also an indication of the level of interest and commitment amongst my colleagues on these matters. Thank you all very much for coming.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Ferguson**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Subcommittee adjourned at 12.20 pm