

Jan Egeland
Emergency Relief Coordinator, UNOCHA
Keynote Address at Launch of TEC Synthesis Report
Geneva, 14 July 2006

Colleagues, co-panellists, thank you all for coming here today. It's an important day really because if we are to make steady progress in our international assistance efforts we have to learn from our experiences and we have to learn from our mistakes, and I think this will be one of the milestones of lessons learned in the history of humanitarian work and in the strive to learn how to go better from emergency to recovery, and that transition is especially difficult. Last week one of the last if not *the* last major group of Acehese families still living in tents was finally given new constructed houses. It took 18 months to come to this stage and it coincides actually with us being able to receive this big report.

The tsunami was unique in the sense that it was one of the few intercontinental disasters that struck some 14 countries in Asia and Africa. It was unique in the amount of money raised and it was unique in the number of actors involved. The review is a welcome, sobering, critical review. It is one that I know we will take very seriously and take it up on its recommendations as the United Nations, as the Interagency Standing Committee of the UN, as non-governmental organisations and as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

The report recognises a lot of achievements. I think it recognises what the local actors that are so often overlooked were able to do as the early responders during the first few days. The report is also full of good practice examples by numerous agencies and the report confirms what we all could see: namely that the emergency relief phase, despite the magnitude of devastation in so many countries, was quite effective in reaching the affected population, and that the affected population was satisfied with the emergency relief by local and international responders. But of course the main points of the evaluation are actually the many shortcomings that were identified; among them that the global humanitarian response and especially the relief to reconstruction and recovery phase is in serious need of reform and a change of modus operandi and of funding modalities. I very much welcome this, because we have now tried in these last 12 months (actually as the evaluators were working very hard on their report) to have more predictable funding through the Central Emergency Response Fund; also to have a more predictable response capacity through clusters in each of the areas that were so critically reviewed in this report; and in having better humanitarian coordinators and coordination in place that more robustly coordinates the many new actors.

We have asked for more accountability and transparency and I think the TEC report is one example of that. The Synthesis Report and its five thematic reports are both comprehensive and critical. The Synthesis does well to detail the areas in which the humanitarian actors – whether it's us and the UN, the NGOs, or the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement, the donors, and the host countries – needs to improve. The report calls for fundamental change or reform in several key areas. It is launched not only in Geneva here today, but also in London by Michael Mosselmans of DFID. Why launch this during ECOSOC? Because the many good lessons and recommendations made in this report, to which over 40 agencies and over 100 independent consultants

contributed, are addressed to all of us. We must rise to the occasion and ensure that we listen; listening is the basis for reforming.

Ten years ago an equally big report was made of the Rwanda effort. It was again a system wide evaluation effort. Since then we have had many new mechanisms, we have many new initiatives, we have many new tools, and still many of the same mistakes were repeated. Why is that standards such as the excellent SPHERE Standards, which describe how shelter should be, how we should operate as agencies and so on, why was it that this was not systematically applied? Why was it that the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles were not fully applied? Why was it that the [Red Cross] Code of Conduct was not fully applied regarding involvement of the affected population?

Now 18 months on, the humanitarian phase is over and we are now in the full recovery phase. The relief needs have been met. It is now recovery that has to be done and I am sure that Eric Schwartz, my colleague, will address that. I believe that the evaluators came last autumn to the areas, I was also there then, when we were in the most difficult and painful period of transition, and could provide a glaring x-ray of our problems at the time.

I urge those implementing programmes today to carefully read the Synthesis Report as well as, for example, the report called Links between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. This report discusses many of the recovery dilemmas and challenges and provides many suggestions for how to address these. I also urge those of you who were involved in the early stages, like myself, to take time to read some of the other reports as they reflect all of the important lessons we need to learn.

Now, the tsunami response was not only remarkable because of the amount of money raised and the speed at which people were able to meet their humanitarian needs, but also for the sheer volume of international organisations involved. And coordination proved difficult not least because of the multitude of actors on the ground and the many initiatives initiated by them, and they were so well funded that they had not necessarily the initiative to join the coordination structures or seek to join the coordination structures that were established.

In the first month in Aceh alone there were almost 400 agencies in the field along with the military forces of 17 nations. And possibly that was 200 too many. Not all assistance programmes, if we look back and try to distinguish the findings, not all assistance programmes were well designed or thought through. The lack of comprehensive and joint needs assessments, the lack of recovery planning and sharing of information contributed to gaps in assistance in some areas and duplication of programming in others. This time we *cannot* excuse poor programming and decision making due to lack of funding. In Somalia maybe we may use that, but not in the tsunami. On the contrary the 2004 tsunami attracted more than \$13 billion worth of assistance. This was a great public response; we raised \$7,100 per capita for the tsunami victims. Contrast that with the \$3 we attracted for our appeal to the 2004 flood victims in Bangladesh. Where is the equity? Or why is one emergency so well funded while the others barely get noticed? And I should say again, this is *precisely* why we have a Central Emergency Response fund and why we are trying to establish equity.

The scale and speed of the funding response helped to ensure that relief and recovery interventions could start early. However the extraordinary levels of funding put pressure on agencies to spend quickly and to compete for clients. Some agencies as a result set up highly visible programmes and some took the easy route to replace assets like boats, for example, in locations that are easy to be reached. Even within this generously funded emergency big inequities were created. The ownership of humanitarian assistance rests with the affected population. National and local capacity must be made central to all decision making. International agencies should focus on affected peoples' priorities rather than on their own institutional or bureaucratic needs, and it didn't always happen.

Information flows during emergencies need to be two-way, and there is also a need to improve flows of information from those we aim to support back to the donor population, tax payers and agencies themselves. Again serious problems were found. Four key recommendations here and let me just list them and the four are among many all together; all good recommendations:

It is important that we all work in partnership rather than in isolation of each other. You would not be surprised that I as Emergency Relief Coordinator would think this as important.

Efforts should be complimentary rather than divisive and relationships should be built on mutual trust rather than on competition for space, turf or money. And our new clusters really is a systematic effort to try to ensure that. We should recognise our limits and areas of expertise and not pretend that each actor has the know-how to do it all. Agencies should not treat recovery activities as extensions to relief operations or simply overstretch themselves and operate outside areas of competence.

The third finding is that we need to improve management of the transition between phases. International agencies should thereby adapt the staffing, the skills, the process and numbers of people and programming planning strategic partnership and operational modalities to fit with medium to long term development interventions.

Fourth of perhaps the key recommendations is that disasters are taking an increasing toll in the future. Therefore, all actors should strive to increase disaster risk reduction and preparedness at community, national and international levels. Donor governments must improve the transition from relief to recovery and development by increasing the flexibility in applying funds from a variety of budgets and instruments in accordance with realities on the ground. And international support must include the appropriate technical expertise, equipment and system through capacity building partnerships and such support must extend to a wide range of local civil society organisations including poorer and marginalised groups as well.

Now, the problems and conclusions:

The problems identified in this TEC Synthesis Report are not at all new. The reform of the humanitarian response system, which we launched last year, is beginning to address many of the fundamental issues around strengthening the response capacity, the humanitarian coordinator system and creating more effective partnerships with

NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and the United Nations. A very important meeting took place yesterday, where also certainly the tsunami evaluation was addressed. This meeting of 40 executives from nearly all of the main NGOs, all of the UN agencies and both of the main Red Cross and Red Crescent movement institutions, was a meeting [to establish how to] really work more together, have a stronger partnership, forge more effective and cooperative, coordinated alliance. Humanitarian reform must also address a number of additional issues identified by the TEC report. I will ask the IASC, the Inter-agency Standing Committee, which, as you know, includes the UN, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs, to review this report carefully and to identify how we can move forward on every single one of the recommendations.

Of course the report is also addressed to the member states, of which so many are here present. We must improve, all of us, our own internal accountability systems as well as become fully accountable to the affected population and the public. We must incorporate disaster risk reduction into all ongoing development and humanitarian programmes and take the commitments we made in Kobe, Japan, and the Kobe Declaration seriously. The tsunami actually helped to give more focus to that world conference for disaster reduction than any conference before of its kind. A call on all governments and agencies to seriously invest in preparedness and disaster risk reduction, whether it is building, supporting or funding national capacity, we must build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels. A number of affected governments have committed to decentralizing their central recovery institutions and/or transferring additional responsibilities to district and sub-district levels. These efforts, including the need to strengthen in-country disaster risk management capacity at all government levels must be accelerated in order to be effective. We must support and not replace local capacities. I am sure the panel will also address that. We need to listen more to the voices of those affected by disasters and make sure they have all the information they need to make their own choices. We must not forget that at root the humanitarian system is about humanity coming together to help the least among us, which is why we need all parts to engage together.

And last but not least aid should not be a lottery but a fundamental human right. The generous response we have with the tsunami should be the rule and not the exception. We should be equally generous to those suffering in more forgotten crises and at the same time be vigilant in keeping abreast of the recovery developments in tsunami affected countries too.

I would like to end by thanking all of those who laboured very hard to produce this report, the evaluation team and thank the member states represented from tsunami affected countries and from the UN, NGOs and donors and others who helped make this report reality. Let us all learn from it. Thank you.