

Remarks

By
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Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

At

Meeting on Tsunami

WHO/SEARO, New Delhi, India
5 April 2006

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**DR SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

WHO Representatives; Colleagues; Ladies and Gentlemen:

I welcome you all to the meeting. It has been more than one year and three months since the Tsunami struck six countries in the South-East Asia Region. The devastation was unprecedented indeed.

We, in WHO, spared no efforts in supporting the affected countries to save lives and mitigate the suffering of the unfortunate population.

Flash appeals were pursued to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to help the countries. Workplans were developed for the execution of those extrabudgetary resources.

During the emergency phase, things had to be done very quickly. Decisions had to be taken very fast, in order to respond in time to the urgent needs of the affected people.

More delegation of authority to WHO Representatives in those countries was effected. This was to ensure their timely decisions and actions.

In the usual circumstance, the emergency and recovery phase lasts about six months. However, the Tsunami of December 2004 was extraordinary. This emergency and recovery phase has been extended more than once, until the end of June this year.

At this point, we can say that all affected countries are out of the emergency phase. However, certain areas and Member States, especially Aceh, in Indonesia and Sri Lanka may be still struggling with the recovery.

Whatever the situation is, a long time has already passed for the emergency and recovery phase. The end of June would be the off point for shifting to the next phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction. This is at least in planning terms.

We have to keep in mind in this exercise that a lot of work is needed for Aceh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, in their rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

In the transition from emergency/recovery to rehabilitation/reconstruction, we have to evaluate and report on our work during the past. And we have to review and revise the workplans for implementation during the next phase.

While doing so, we have to always keep in mind that there have been a number of overlapping activities between the two phases. Some activities of rehabilitation/ reconstruction have already taken place. And some activities for recovery may still be needed during the next phase. To a certain extent, the two phases do not stand alone and are not mutually exclusive.

In the emergency/recovery phase, our main concern is saving lives and mitigating suffering.

In the rehabilitation/ reconstruction phase, we will have to emphasize the strengthening or building of country capacity. This is particularly so in areas of emergency preparedness and response. And we will have to ensure the sustainability of the developments gained during this phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

We will have to intensify our work with sectors other than health; and with several agencies, government and non-governmental. Therefore, the workplans will have to be adjusted and revised accordingly to reflect a proper perspective in that direction.

There will be no more flash appeal funds for emergency or recovery. There will be only funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

According to our review at the Regional Office, the termination of funds for the first phase will be staggered among donors. Most donors will terminate their funding support to Tsunami operations by the end of June this year. Some donors will stop their funding at the end September, or even at the end of December this year. Therefore, there will be some funds from the first phase after 30 June this year. These funds have to be replanned or adjusted as part of the second phase.

During an emergency, we have to do things quickly, as I said. Because of such a rush, we had made a number of mistakes. We were criticized for those mistakes by donors; and sometimes by the affected countries themselves. Nevertheless, please keep in mind that we had acted in such a hasty way and mistakes were actually made. But, that was done with good intentions to help the suffering people. We accept that mistakes were made; and we accept the criticism.

From now on, we will have time to think more carefully, as far as our work for the Tsunami of 26 December 2004 is concerned. We will have time to plan and implement the plans in a much more rational manner.

Now, look at our plan for this meeting. According to its objectives, there will be discussions on the transition from emergency/ recovery to rehabilitation/ reconstruction. But, we have only one day for the meeting. We will not have enough time for a careful review of all workplans of the first phase. And we will have no time to revise them to suit the situation of the second phase.

I see the necessity that after this meeting, we will need to have a planning exercise at the country level. SEARO/EHA will provide technical back-up to the exercise.

Therefore, before we leave this meeting, there must be time for us to discuss and prepare for that country planning exercise. The country planning exercise will have to take into account the remaining funds carried over from the first phase, and the funds that are provided for rehabilitation/reconstruction.

According to the programme provided, during this meeting, you will spend most of the time on the review of various aspects of the implementation of the first phase workplans. I would like to suggest strongly that we strike a good balance between reviewing the past and looking forward to the future. Proper planning for phase 2 is equally important, compared with the review of the past implementation.

However, we have to keep in mind also that such a plan for the second phase has to be developed on the basis of our experiences gained during the first phase. I have already dwelled at length on various related issues for your consideration in the course of this meeting.

Before concluding, I would like to think aloud of the possibility of having one final meeting for the first phase; this is to share the lessons from our experiences and look forward to the future as far as emergency preparedness and response is concerned.

This proposed meeting may take place at the end of June. I have asked the Deputy Regional Director to start the preparation without delay. This final meeting for the first phase must be really different from the previous tsunami meetings.

Now, let me wish all of you a productive meeting; and I wish those who have come from other countries, an enjoyable stay in Delhi.