

HIV PREVENTION EFFORTS SOAR AMID TSUNAMI RELIEF

Unprecedented opportunity for AIDS response in emergency situations, but more needs to be done

Kobe, 4 July 2005 – Six months after the Asian tsunami, opportunities for HIV prevention in hard-hit areas are better than ever.

Half a year after the tsunami of December 2004, there is increased awareness of HIV among the thousands of people affected by the tsunami as well as the humanitarian, health or military personnel involved in post-disaster efforts, mainly in Indonesia. This greater understanding allows people to better protect themselves against infection. There is also a coherent plan for AIDS in areas hit by the tsunami so duplication and overlap are avoided and long-term strategies can be put in place.

“We have an unprecedented opportunity for prevention through tsunami relief efforts,” said Prasada Rao, Director of UNAIDS Regional Support Team in Bangkok. “This sensitive reconstruction period is exactly when AIDS prevention efforts have to be launched. If we wait until after relief efforts are over, HIV will spread faster as people become more vulnerable.”

The tsunami disaster displaced close to 1.1 million people, and many lost or were separated from their families, spouses or partners and exposed to unique pressures, work constraints, living conditions and possible sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. All these factors increased their vulnerability to infection from HIV or sexually transmitted infections.

The earthquake and subsequent tsunamis exacerbated vulnerability to HIV infection. In any emergency, basic services break down and across areas devastated by the tsunami, health care systems were destroyed, condoms became hard to find, and HIV prevention and care programmes were disrupted.

“Despite the successes in making sure AIDS is taken into account during an emergency, much work still needs to be done,” said Jane Wilson, UNAIDS Country Coordinator in Indonesia, who has been coordinating the AIDS response during the tsunami relief efforts. “It is still difficult for all involved in relief efforts to see why such a long-term issue as AIDS must be dealt with immediately. But there is increasing understanding in those areas devastated by the tsunami that any relief effort must also include AIDS.”

Mainstreaming the AIDS response into the post-tsunami effort has been made possible by applying recent international guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings to a natural disaster for the first time. These guidelines were prepared by a body called the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), made up of 17 partners including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The IASC Guidelines help coordinate and integrate HIV prevention interventions into emergency action plans of international humanitarian organizations and governments.

[Click here for international guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings.](#)

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