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Address to the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami

By

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Thank you, Mr. President.

On behalf of myself, my colleagues, my institution and also the IMF, let me first offer our deepest condolences and sense of loss to you, your people, and the people of all of the countries affected by this tsunami disaster.

At a time when effective delivery of emergency relief is clearly the highest priority, we warmly support the leadership role of the UN and will support the Secretary General and his team in any way that we can.

The enormous force of this national tragedy is one of many reminders that we are all linked together, by forces that are both visible and invisible: forces of nature, forces of poverty, of disease, terrorism, crime, drugs. These forces remind us all of how tiny we are in the force of nature and how, at the same time, we are all indelibly connected.

This means that we must also respond to this crisis in the context of the many things that link us together, and particularly our efforts to achieve the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and a better world for all. We should remember the majority of the people killed were poor, impoverished and unable to defend themselves.

The international response so far has been terrific. It's more urgent that we work together so that we can deal with this emergency relief stage effectively.

The reconstruction stage can then also begin quickly: this reconstruction stage is not just a matter of financial resources and physical infrastructure but it's also very much a matter of human beliefs and emotional pressures. It's rebuilding the individual lives of real people and families and children - these are the issues that we must emphasize. In this context, the roles of the communities, civil society, and the private sector are very important as we work to respond together.

Here in Indonesia, the large scale KDP (Kecamatan Development Program) Community Development program, which is operational in all regions, including Aceh, is a very useful model. This program calls on local communities to run their own lives, establish priorities for development and help in implementing those priorities themselves.

Engaging the people of poor communities in this way makes the development process real. And we, in the World Bank, certainly want to work this way, trying to help people rebuild not only physical assets but also their own confidence and hope for future.

We also hope to work closely with other international financial institutions, particularly the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and others.

Let me also stress that this is not a post conflict situation, it's not a situation where there is no government - and where we would have to seek to build governments and administrative structures. Here, as we have heard so eloquently and articulately this morning, we have existing governments with their own ideas, flaws, and needs. It is a specific aim of our institution to work closely in support of the government, of affected countries, working on their priorities and programs. It is not our objective to try to create unnecessary new organizational structures.

We also believe very strongly that the use of our public resources should be transparent, effective, and show clear results. This would help not only in the case of this emergency response, but also support the governments concerned with the transparent and effective use of public resources in general.

A further important principle which I believe should be observed not only by my institution but by others as well, is that the support being offered to meet these special needs be continuous, consistent, and additional to whatever we were or are doing already.

So many of us come to important meetings and make pledges; sometimes it may be that the overall level of assistance doesn't increase, it's just shifted around. It may make us feel good, but we simply cannot take resources away from other critical development issues and put the same resources into one emergency after another. Resources must be additional. They must be consistent. This is an absolutely clear cut message.

Finally, let me add my support to the proposals to establish an early warning system for natural disasters of this kind. We would be very happy to help with this. We are also supportive of the ideas for making debt relief part of the response, and I understand these ideas will be discussed at a forthcoming meeting of the Paris Club.

Mr. President, this particular emergency is an opportunity, an opportunity to demonstrate in a largely visible way to all the world that we are not just bureaucrats, financiers, or administrators. It's a chance to build on the global outpouring of emotions at the human level, to create a world with less conflict, more peace, and less poverty. That is certainly the way our institution is approaching this.

Thank you.