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## UN looks to long-term recovery plans after slew of disasters in Asia-Pacific



Filipinos go hand-in-hand to help each other who were caught in the flood

5 October 2009 – United Nations agencies are mobilizing to provide longer-term recovery aid to a raft of countries in Asia and the Pacific, where a relentless barrage of tropical storms, earthquakes and tsunamis have hit millions of people in recent days.

“Within hours after the catastrophes hit, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began working in support of national authorities to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs in these countries,” said UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark in Bangkok, where she is holding meetings.

“UNDP is now preparing to support countries’ plans for longer-term recovery after waters recede and rubble is cleared,” she added, noting that with rapid support teams had already been sent to Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines, which have been inundated by typhoon-spawned flood waters, and Bhutan, Indonesia, Samoa and Tonga, which were hit by earthquakes and/or subsequent tsunamis.

In the Philippines, Typhoon Parma reached the far northern province of Cagayan over the weekend, a week after Typhoon Ketsana (also known as Ondoy) inundated Manila, the capital, and affected more than 3.1 million people. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (OCHA) said nearly 870,000 people are in more than 720 evacuation shelters. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is mounting a three-month emergency operation.

In the Indonesian island of Sumatra the confirmed death toll from three earthquakes last week stands at 603 but is expected to rise significantly, since thousands are trapped and feared dead in the collapsed buildings in Padang, the provincial capital. A nine-member UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has been deployed there.

Nevertheless, nearly 70,000 children have returned to classes in Padang, according to local education authorities, as the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) rushed school supplies to the region, rapidly erecting the first of 250 classroom tents, as part of its initial support to re-starting education, along with school materials and recreational equipment.

“This is an important sign that life will return to normal for children affected by this tragedy,” UNICEF Country Representative in Indonesia Angela Kearney said.

“Many children I have met amidst the shattered buildings of Padang expressed their fears for the future – they are worried about more shocks, about losing their homes, and about never going back to school again. Today, children can see that schools will re-open, and that they will be able to continue their learning. It’s a first step towards bringing the comfort and reassurance that these children so desperately need.”

Food, tents and emergency shelter, medical supplies, hygiene kits, petrol, generators, heavy equipment, water and sanitation assistance, education and post-traumatic counseling have been identified as priority needs in Sumatra.

In American Samoa, Samoa and Tonga’s northern island of Niuaotupapu, where more than 120 are now confirmed dead, and waves destroyed homes and public infrastructure including sea walls, hospitals, schools, roads and tourist resorts, UNDP has made available emergency grants to support coordination efforts, a needs assessment and an early recovery plan.

After wreaking havoc in the Philippines, Typhoon Ketsana moved into Viet Nam. But with warning of the impending storm, approximately 200,000 people were evacuated by national emergency services.

“Early warning saves lives,” Ms. Clark said. “With the increasing impact of climate change, this area of our work will need to grow in order to help those most vulnerable to disasters,” she added.

Unexpected floods also wrought havoc in South India. Even Bhutan was not spared from disaster when an earthquake in the east of the remote mountainous country killed 12 people, and damaged nearly 43,500 homes, 89 schools and more than 115 Government offices and 400 monasteries. A joint World Bank and UN damage assessment has begun in two affected districts.