Special Coordinator Briefs Press on Return from Aceh

Update on the Relief Effort in Indonesia

JAKARTA (Joint Press Release): The hard-core emergency phase of disaster relief in Indonesia was well under way and the machinery needed to assist people was accelerating, according to Margareta Wahlström, United Nations Special Coordinator for Tsunami Relief Efforts, who addressed correspondents at the Media Center this morning.

Ms. Wahlström was stopping in Jakarta after a visit to Banda Aceh, where she engaged in discussions with Government authorities and United Nations coordination units.

The crucial issue now, she said, was to further accelerate cooperation between the various actors, especially between those in the UN system and the Indonesian Government. She stressed that the UN was here to coordinate international assistance to Indonesian Government. Her discussions with the Government were positive and should yield immediate results in utilizing the resources that were being made available.

It was also, she said, crucial to complete and collate the various assessments of the UN system, the NGOs and the Government. The health status of the entire West Coast region was being assessed. The mapping of displaced persons, important in formulating the Government’s plans for voluntary relocations, was also progressing.

In her discussions with the Government, another major concern was how the influx of international humanitarian workers could be used productively, including those from hundreds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Otherwise, such workers could become a source of frustration to the Government. In that effort, she took the Government’s stated concern about their security and its desire to register NGOs in a positive light. It was to the advantage of everyone involved that the identity, whereabouts and purpose of all actors be known.

Regarding the overall issue of security, she said that the UN was accustomed to operating in conflict zones and had standard procedures for security management while working closely with Governments. There had been, as yet, no reports of obstacles being place on
humanitarian aid because of conflict in Aceh either by the Government or by the Aceh separatist movement (GAM). If problems arose, they would be dealt with as they came along.

In response to correspondents’ questions, Ms. Wahlström said that the UN presence would probably decrease as the focus changed from emergency aid to reconstruction and as Government capacity in Aceh grew. In addition, rumors that the UN was charging a fee of $350 million to manage the international assistance were false; there was a total of around $400 million pledged to the Indonesian relief effort and the small percentage of that targeted to administration could be seen in the budgets, which were public and open. The UN was not taking any profit. Regarding questions on infectious diseases, she said that comprehensive monitoring had as yet detected no cause for alarm, and inoculations and public health measures were progressing. Measures to employ local workers were also taking place, and life was gradually being restored to Banda Aceh. She urged equal media attention be given to rural areas over the course of the reconstruction.

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