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Voices of Youth
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Tsunami Terror Alert: Voices of Youth

17 January 2005 / New York / *Voices of Youth* – This third summary underscores children and adolescents on Voices of Youth's continued concern with the relief effort in response to the 26 December tsunami. Since 13 January, participants have added corruption and misuse of funds to their concerns.

In response to the 13 January update, the East Asia and Pacific Regional UNICEF office requested young people reflect on a series of questions to help with their efforts. These questions, and the summary written by a Voices of Youth member, and supplemented by the VOY team, are below.

Voices of Youth member summary, 17 January 2005

Jla, 14, USA

Reflections

Voices of Youth (VOY) is a great place to share ideas of how to help in disaster situations such as this. It is also a great place to learn how others who were actually in areas near the tsunami and our age are coping with everything. We can see through other's eyes what is happening and what has happened.

VOY is an awesome place to express thoughts and ideas.

Creative action

Ideas that have been talked about are sending letters and pictures to some children to comfort them. Many other ideas have been brought up again and again, such as donating stuffed animals and raising money.

Members have also promoted artists and creative approaches to helping the children affected by the tsunami:

"May be u guys can draw up some pictures, which would help soothe the minds of the children affected by the tsunami. Another thing that all of you could do together with your class (this doesn't need money either) is to write letters to these kids, assuring them that you will be there for them, to help them out of what has happened. We can translate those and give them to the kids. They can write to you people in return explaining their situation. That could be a good way to help them get rid of their trauma, by telling it out to somebody else." *Rusiru, Sri Lanka*

Life after the tsunami: Refugee camps

There were some questions asked about the situation of the refugee camps and such. Knowing this really helped others visualize what it is like in the tsunami struck areas. In summary, it's pretty terrible.

"I think the situation in refugee camps now are no doubt cramped and there are still lack of tents and sanitation in some areas which aid is trying to provide now." *Mingzy, Singapore*

Security

The need to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation remains a constant topic of discussion and source for concern. One very active participant from Singapore, Mingzy (21, young woman), raised some good points about the constraints and suggestions for what can be done:

“...it's difficult to check the details 1) everyone's too busy 2) records are washed away or damaged. But right now, security measures have been stepped up. Agencies have moved into prevent children from being removed from the country, more security, helpers are now more watchful and mindful of children.

I think no matter how much security you have and measures in place to protect children, it boils down to the predators and ethics. If people are intent on causing harm, they will find a way to do so no matter what... We can do our best to prevent but we cannot directly control the predators from their criminal actions.” *Mingzy, Singapore*

Donations & funding

Participants spoke at length about the use of money, questioning both how relief agencies and governments are using funds.

UN and funding: One question brought up was why the UN asked for so much money (\$350 million according to Je5s1ca, Indonesia). This was primarily due to confusion around whether or not the UN was requesting money for relief work or for its own operations. Voices of Youth responded by clarifying that the funds are for relief and rehabilitation.

Avantika of the USA found that the president of the USA committed \$350 million to tsunami relief efforts and says that other countries are also part of that commitment.

Governments: Participants also questioned the governments and their use of the money coming in, worrying that money would be diverted or cheated. An Indonesian member put a plea to her government:

“Please, don't u ever cheat with the money and fund they gave to our country, just don't mess around with those money, use those money to build the new houses, new school, new public society, use the money wisely...just imagine if that could have happened to your children one day and your children will be crying out loud, devastated fir help, please put it in your mind Mr. President...don't u ever do that to them.....I will be so ashamed as Indonesian if that happened...” *Sangsaka, Indonesian in USA*

Volunteering

Young people are anxious to be active in the post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts and are frustrated at the lack of opportunities. One participant from the Ukraine aired her concerns:

“I went on a lot of websites to ask them if I can volunteer along with their company. They wrote back, saying that at this time they do not need any volunteers. But if they had some extra volunteers, they might be looking after those kids that don't have families, and that wander around.” *Shabanu14, Ukrainian in USA*

Questions from the field

As a response to the summaries and discussions, UNICEF staff in the affected region have asked that members reflect on the following questions – all of which are critical to the relief and rehabilitation work after the tsunami.

1. How can VOY be useful in such a situation?
2. Suggestion for how to help affected children deal with trauma?
3. How can the tsunami present an opportunity to promote peace and resolve conflicts in Aceh and Sri Lanka?
4. Your suggestions for how to use the donated funds effectively - many aid organizations are overwhelmed by donations and are struggling to mobilize the 'absorptive capacity' to make good use of the resources

You can read more of the Voices of Youth discussions on the Voices of Youth discussion forums at: *Tsunami Terror*: <http://www.unicef.org/voy/discussions/forumdisplay.php?f=68>. We request you to please use available channels to publicise this e-space with your staff, partner organisations and especially youth organisations and networks in your country and region.