



Tsunami Terror Alert: Voices of Youth

27 January 2005 – New York / Nigeria / Voices of Youth – Below is the sixth Voices of Youth update on young people's thoughts, and suggestions for action, in regards to the 26 December Indian Ocean tsunami. Written by a VOY member from Nigeria, with inputs from the VOY team, this update focuses on the direct responses to questions posed by UNICEF staff in the field and headquarters about relief and rehabilitation processes, as well as documents another thank you for support from the region.

We hope this summary will be useful as you concretize relief and rehabilitation policies and plans.

Voices of Youth member summary Oyebisi, >21, Nigeria

"Youths too do have a voice"

Young people from regions of the world have been lending their voices to the tsunami disaster – even those affected in the disaster are not left out. It is so amazing to hear youth and children give ideas on how the tsunami victims can be helped; thus demonstrating active involvement of youth, children and adolescents at building a just world.

Responses to questions from UNICEF

This update focuses particular attention to the comprehensive responses of one young person in the USA; for previous responses, please refer to prior tsunami terror updates.

1. How can VOY be useful in such a situation?

VOY definitely can be useful in such a situation because it brings together people from all over the world to discuss. It is so convenient to log onto the forums and talk with people from the Middle East, North/South America, Europe, Asia, and etc. We can all share ideas on how to approach a topic like the Tsunami terror. I've also realized that the VOY is very useful when it comes to bringing a light of hope and sparking a flame of passion in a lot of members. They seem to want to help and they definitely have a strong determination to work with others to improve the world and society.

2. Suggestion for how to help affected children deal with trauma?

*Well, I think it really depends. My first thought would be: Does this require therapists or professional people to cope with children with trauma? If that is not the case, I would say getting children that were affected with trauma to come together in **small groups** to discuss how they felt going through such terror. Sometimes, letting others know how you feel is sometimes the best way because there are people listening to you and understand how you feel. They can let go of their burden and feel relieved that they aren't the only ones going through such a situation. In the small discussion groups, there should be an adult facilitator that can guide the discussions and "cheer" them on to help their self-esteem. Say things like "We're here for each other" or "We all understand what you're feeling." Those "corny" quotes are corny but they can be effective. Also, by placing children in small discussion groups, everyone will be familiar with each other and give each other support and hope.*

3. How can the tsunami present an opportunity to promote peace and resolve conflicts in Aceh and Sri Lanka?

When people are involved in a mass terror crisis such as the Tsunami event, they come together. Negative events can ironically promote positive things. However, peace negotiations must happen now between Aceh and Sri Lanka because the opportunity will dry out later on. Right now, they are only "cooperating" because many lives were lost and everyone, including themselves, was left with nothing. Survival is on their mind, which would lead them to try to negotiate a tie with each other, but only for the time being. However, if any ties of permanent ties between Aceh and Sri Lanka are settled, I believe politics must get involved.

4. What do you think is most important in terms of support for children separated from or who have lost their families?

*Since the children have been either separated from or lost their families, I think the children should build another tie, especially with other children who have lost/separated from their parents. They could all work together and discuss to each other about their pains and sorrows. Besides trying to build new relationship ties with other children (as a means for support and hope), the donations that all organizations have gotten should fund directly to building safe shelters for children. **Shelters, in my opinion, should be separated between adults and children.** Children have different needs, as odd as that sounds. And if the shelters were separated, the children would get more attention to their needs. They would be given more food (nutrition is definitely important.). We do not want the children to die of malnutrition (even something like diarrhea, which is very common and seriously can cause death if not treated after a long period of time). The children should also be given medical attention because disease is very high in those tsunami-stricken areas. Also, I believe schools are not really the best thing to think about right now. What kind of children would be thinking about school after they just lost loved ones? Wait maybe a few months after the "side-effects" of losing a loved one wears off a little. For the time being, like I mentioned before, tend to their trauma by having them talk about their pains to other children and adults.*

Voices of Youth responded to this posting with some additional questions for thought copied below. Your suggestions for additional questions are welcome:

- How would you group the children? By age, experience, sex...?
- How do you see getting politics involved? What do you think would be needed to have a permanent solution? And where do you see young people involved?
- How long would children stay in these shelters?
- Would reunification efforts (children and their families) be part of the plan?
- If education is not a priority, how and when will these children go back to school? What about the rights of all children?

Taking undue advantage of Tsunami Victims?

Participants on VOY expressed concern about the activities of some organizations helping children affected by the December 26th Tsunami disaster. Reflecting on media reports, one participant from Australia posted the following:

"After the tsunami hit, there were many orphans with nowhere to go. A so called 'Christian' organization gathered up three hundred of these orphans and asked people for donations to help 'place' them in a Christian children's home, their faith in Christ could become the foothold to reach the Aceh people. This to me is the very sort of opportunistic [stuff] that mars the Christian church."
(Random Chick, Australia)

Acknowledging Support: Coming together

Participants from areas affected by the tsunami acknowledged support from the United Nations, international agencies and Governments around the world, continuing their feeling that the tsunami has had the unintended benefit of bringing people together and creating a global community:

"Sri Lanka has asked for help and we have got it. Not only from the Americans but also from the Indians, Pakistanis, Canadians, British, Austrians, Bangladeshis, Australians, Norwegians and also the World Bank, The United Nations, UNICEF, Red Cross and a host of other countries and organizations...!"- (Rusiru, Sri Lanka)

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 organizations and especially youth organizations and networks in your country and region.