

**Notes on the Presentation by Mark Bowden, Director of Policy Branch, UNOCHA  
During the UN Tsunami Roundtable (February 13, 2006)**

Mr. Bowden looked at relief work from the evaluation perspective. Although the 2004 Tsunami was not the largest natural disaster in history, it was unique because devastation reached across two continents and affected fourteen countries.

The Tsunami was also unique because of the timing, which generated greater public interest than other disasters. One challenge was coordinating resources. The UN provided \$700 million in relief, while NGOs provided \$3.5 billion and the International Red Cross raised \$2 billion.

Another challenge was coordinating the rapid increase in NGOs that specialized in the tsunami. There were three major successes in the wake of the Tsunami: within six months 500,000 people had shelter, major public health problems were avoided, and military assets were used effectively. The Tsunami was a great test to the humanitarian system and despite the major successes this disaster highlights four major areas of concern, including inadequately addressing the needs of the elderly.

- First, there were issues of assessment. There was poor data collection, no disaggregated data, and no overall needs assessment of the elderly. Furthermore, relief was externally driven without local consultation.

- Second, there were problems in international response capacity. The UN does not have an agency to specifically provide shelter during emergencies. Camp management lacked leadership for displaced persons.

- Third, since displaced persons are usually thought to be displaced by conflict there was confusion over where responsibility lay for people displaced by natural disasters. The rights of displaced persons need to be protected and particular attention should be given to elders because they suffer disproportionately. For those with further interest, Walter Kälin has written a paper on internally displaced persons.

- Fourth, there is a lack of leadership in coordination. There are countries without humanitarian coordination systems, plus NGOs and the UN system do not work well together. Bowden promotes utilizing local NGOs to work with the elderly.

Recommendations:

- Create stronger, more effective assessments to close the gap in addressing elderly needs.
- Address gaps in capacity (i.e. providing shelter) in a way that reflects the society's needs.
- Create an international policy that will provide a better protection framework for displaced and elderly persons in natural disasters.
- Strengthen coordination efforts.

Because the UN does not have a policy specifically directed toward protection of older persons in emergencies, there is need for a better mechanism to address older and

displaced persons. The UN has no means for reporting on older persons in emergencies. The Security Council may receive better reporting on the concerns for the protection of older persons in conflict situations. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee will also review how humanitarian organisations can better address these issues. At present, the humanitarian community can consult the annual disaster report of the Federation of the Red Cross Movement.