

PRESS RELEASE

medica mondiale Reports of Sexual Abuse in Regions Struck by the Tsunami

Organisation helps rebuild women's centre in Aceh, Indonesia.

Cologne, 12.1.2005. The women's rights organization medica mondiale has denounced the rape of women and girls taking place in regions of Southeast Asia affected by the tsunami. As the Cologne-based women's organization reported today [12 January 2005], the flood waters in Sri Lanka had hardly receded when incidents of gang and individual rape started to occur. medica mondiale refers to reports from women's organizations in Sri Lanka that detail cases of sexual abuse and at refugee camps.

medica mondiale has reported that in areas where the public order has broken down the perpetrators have free reign and their deeds go unpunished. There are fears that the reports from Sri Lanka will be echoed in other regions affected by the tsunami. This shows that women's risk of sexual violence increases not only during times of war, but also during the chaos of devastation and the first relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters.

Army's problematic role in Aceh

In this context, medica mondiale has pointed out the problematic role of the Indonesian army in coordinating relief efforts: For decades it was the army that employed rape as a means to intimidate and terrorize the people of Aceh. Now the Indonesian government has increased its troops for rescue work in the region; troops that are also used for renewed military operations against Aceh's independence movement.

medica mondiale calls for the following:

- The international community must urge both sides to keep the cease fire in Aceh.
- All cases of sexual abuse that occur in connection with tsunami relief projects in affected countries must be prosecuted; in addition, adequate complaints mechanisms must be established.
- The responsible ministries of the affected countries as well as international civil and military organizations must finally develop joint guidelines on the security of women and girls along the lines of UN resolution 1325.
- The staff of all relief organizations active in the tsunami-stricken regions must be informed of the traumatic effects of sexual violence and be made to understand that such violence is a violation of human rights.
- Relief workers must be contractually bound to do everything they can to prevent such abuse within their areas of responsibility and to report the cases they discover.

- Qualified staff and help centres for treating traumatized women at the local level must be set up immediately.

Financial Support for Flower Aceh

medica mondiale will give financial support as part of an emergency relief effort to help Flower Aceh, a women's organization in Aceh, Indonesia rebuild its centre completely destroyed by the tsunami. Established in 1989, Flower Aceh provides medical, psychological, and material support to women who have been raped and sexually tortured in the course of military counterinsurgency operations under the Suharto government. When Suharto fell from power in 1998, the enormous extent of sexual violence carried out by the military was exposed to the world. After a short reprieve, new conflicts broke out, and rapes began to occur again in the context of military operations or within police custody. In 2001 the founder of Flower Aceh, Suraiya Kammaruzzaman, received the Yap Thiam Hien human rights award, bringing international attention to the work of her organization.

medica mondiale wants to use the money to help rebuilding the Flower Aceh centre supplying it with furniture, computers, and other communication devices. In addition, the money will be used to provide necessary food, clothing, and medical supplies to the clients and staff of the centre. As Suraiya Kamaruzzaman told medica mondiale by telephone, "Many activists have been working themselves to exhaustion, even though they too have lost everything."

medica mondiale asks urgently for your donations to help its effort in Aceh.

More information about the current situation in Aceh will be available starting this afternoon on our Web site:

www.medicamondiale.org

ATTENTION: Our Asian consultant, Gabriela Mischkowski, is available for interviews starting immediately: 0221-696 357 or 0172-2459460.

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