

UN COORDINATION OF TSUNAMI AID?

On December 26, 2004, an unprecedented tsunami disaster struck the Indian Ocean region. Victims, families, governments and peoples of those States suffered huge losses of life and socio-economic and environmental damage. Yet the scope, drama, and devastation of this disaster prompted what became an equally unprecedented multi-billion dollar response and outpouring of contributions and aid -- from the "international community", governments, civil society, and the private sector and individuals. These resources had then to be organized by the UN and others to address the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts needs of the communities severely affected in Indonesia, the Maldives, Myanmar, the Seychelles, Somalia, and Sri Lanka.

See "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", General Assembly resolution 59/279 of **19 January 2005**.

This subsection is one of only two topics under Other Major Problems with a title that ends with a question mark, because it is presently only an emerging UN major operation (the other, Manager/investigators?, concerns a submerged programme.) Like the UN-administered oil-for-food programme in Iraq, the tsunami relief and reconstruction process will involve billions of dollars, and will run its course for several years before one can tell whether the UN has coordinated it successfully or produced another major failure.

The tsunami disaster came at a very difficult, but propitious, time for the UN, as nicely summarized by a January 2005 article.

"The [December 2004 tsunami disaster] is proving to have many unintended political consequences, not least its impact on the United Nations. Isolated diplomatically over Iraq, beset with financial and sexual scandals and manifestly failing to halt genocide in Sudan, the UN must prove its mettle in dealing with the humanitarian crisis in South-east Asia or face a threat to its very existence. ...

... Last month, Kofi Annan, the beleaguered secretary general, hosted a secret meeting of his supporters with the aim 'to save Kofi and rescue the UN.' ...

[After] the end of the Cold War ... the UN ... idea of being a world policeman ... fell apart once again. ...

That should have left the autonomous UN agencies -- tasked with everything from feeding refugees to protecting world heritage sites -- to get on with their unglamorous but invaluable role. ...

The best solution [to the UN's current problems] is a new secretary general ... perhaps a former prime minister or president ... It might also be more efficient, in the light of the tsunami

experience, to hive off the UN's overlapping civil emergency organizations ... [and merge them] into a single international rescue agency ..."

George Kerevan, "Has impotent UN finally outlived its usefulness?", The Scotsman, 5 January 2005.

UN officials and supporters quickly seized on this opportunity, as indicated by the following quotes.

"Talk about a busy week. As head of the United Nations Development Program, 51-year-old Mark Malloch Brown has spent the past few days hopping from one disaster-struck region in Asia to the next. Meanwhile, he is also preparing for his new role as ... Kofi Annan's chief of staff ... charged with seeing the United Nations through one of the most trying periods in its 59-year history. Plagued by allegations of corruption, inefficiency and even irrelevance, the world body will need urgent attention ...

[Question:] Is this a chance for the United Nations to show that it is truly a viable organization ...?

[Answer:] This is one of the things that even the United Nations' critics usually acknowledge it's good at -- humanitarian intervention. We had disaster teams on the ground within a day. We have very strong country offices in all the [affected] countries ... already at work. We have a network of disaster partners from around the world who were quickly mobilized by this. We do this well. We couldn't do it without the logistics backbone of the United States and others, but there's recognition that it's a more internationally acceptable way to do it."

"These were poor people: The Last Word: Mark Malloch Brown", Newsweek International, January 17, 2005.

" ... Former US President Bill Clinton, in New York today to launch a [new tsunami aid fund with UNICEF], voiced confidence in the world body's ability to lead the relief effort.

'No one has questioned the commitment or the integrity or the impact of the United Nations humanitarian efforts', he said in response to a question on the Oil-for-Food allegations. 'That has not even been a matter in dispute.'

The White House website, he pointed out, has UNICEF and the overall UN relief effort on its list of charities that are reliable. 'So there is absolutely no dispute about that as far as I know across the political spectrum in America,' he said.'

"UN undertaking management review in response to early findings in Oil-for-Food probe", UN News Service, 10 January 2005.

[Note: This sweeping public statement is of course contradicted by all the material cited in this subsection, in the title of the UN's own article above which contained Mr. Clinton's assertions, and especially in the subsection of this archive on the Iraq oil-for-food programme and indeed the entire subsection on UN, Alone and Unaccountable .

In addition, Mr. Annan then appointed Mr. Clinton in early February to be his special envoy for tsunami aid and perhaps some peacekeeping work in the tsunami area. This action revived past talk of Mr. Clinton as the next UN Secretary-General, although most feel this is very, very unlikely to occur since he comes from a [the?] major (with a veto) UN member state. See Mark Turner, "Annan appoints Clinton as envoy for tsunami aid", Financial Times (UK), February 2, 2005.]

"Two very different scenes have been unfolding dramatically on separate floors at the United Nations headquarters in New York in the past week. In one suite, officials are digging out from under a mountain of critical internal audits of the \$64 billion [€ 49bm] Iraqi oil-for-food programme ... [as part of the Volcker] inquiry into charges of mismanagement and corruption. ...

Elsewhere in the building, the team co-ordinating the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami catastrophe is establishing a web-based financial tracking system that will enable anyone, including the public, to trace where relief dollars are coming from and how they are being spent. It is also setting up a squad to investigate credible allegations of fraud and waste. PricewaterhouseCoopers is helping to build the system, which will be overseen by an external advisory board. ...

I witnessed [this contrast] throughout my own tenure at the UN. ... Whereas traditionalists treat opaqueness as a strategic asset, for modernists transparency is the key to institutional success. ...

[Kofi] Annan is by instinct a modernist ... As [he] goes about rebuilding his senior management team, he would be well advised to add to each job description: only modernists need apply."

John Ruggie, "Modernists must take over the United Nations, Financial Times (UK), **January 24, 2005**.

[Note: Mr. Ruggie served under Mr. Annan as a UN assistant secretary-general from 1997-2001. His optimism for the UN tsunami coordination team seems excessive on several counts. PricewaterhouseCoopers are *the* experts in financial tracking systems and oversight (see the quote of January 12, 2005 later in this subsection) rather than just "helping" the UN, which has had little success in both areas. Further, the oil-for-food scandal report of January February 2005 emphasized the inadequate UN audit and investigation staffing for (and commitment and priority given to) to such major oversight efforts, raising valid doubts that the Secretariat can now, suddenly, field a full "squad" to cover all aspects of the tsunami relief programme. In addition, while Mr. Annan may be a modernist by "instinct", in practice he has presided for eight years over a very traditionalist team, programme, and multiplying set of scandals of non-accountability and non-transparency, especially as detailed in this archive's subsection on Late 2004: A "tipping point" for the UN?]

In fact, IO Watch has found that the UN has developed a consistently poor record over the years in attempting to provide effective humanitarian relief coordination, a pattern which may well still continue at present. The most incisive book ever written about UN operations, by Rosemary Righter in 1995, summarized these efforts very well. She began by citing a book by Randolph Kent in 1987:

"Randolph Kent's study of international disaster relief is a considered, compassionate, and pessimistic assessment of the whole sorry history of *ad hoc* expedients and what he politely calls 'institutional insecurities.' He points out that it took the Nigerian civil war (which claimed, without UN intervention as peacekeeper, perhaps a million casualties ...), the Peruvian earthquake, and the combination of war with natural disaster in Bangladesh -- all of which occurred between 1967 and 1971 -- 'to bring the simmering issues of the United Nations' role in emergency operations to the boil.' Unproductively on the boil it has remained. Since 1971, no fewer than ten UN disaster units have been created, each exerting its claim to be treated as contact point, fund-raiser, coordinator, and assessor, each with a mandate in excess of its capacities. Alongside these are at least a dozen national disaster units, and an increasingly sophisticated, relatively well coordinated and flexibly managed assortment of voluntary organizations."

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, **1995**, p. 290. [emphasis added.]

[Note: The book referred to is Randolph C. Kent, Anatomy of disaster relief: The international network in action, Frances Pinter, London, **1987**.

In fact, Ms. Righter observed, in most humanitarian crises people give most of their money not to the UN but to the Red Cross, to charities, or to their own governments. In 1971, however, the General

Assembly established the most long-lived (and most feckless) coordination unit, the Office of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO). It was intended to "mobilize, direct and coordinate relief" in response to requests from a "stricken" country. But Ms. Righter found that, "In practice, UNDRO rarely managed to act even as traffic policeman, let alone the focus for action." She cited a severe report by the UN Joint Inspection Unit in 1980 (after nine years of UNDRO existence) which found that:

"[UNDRO] ... had no authority as a coordinator, had developed no strategy for disaster relief operations, was almost useless as an information center, and had done little or nothing 'to reduce waste and inefficiency in relief administration.' The inspectors' final report, acknowledging the view of many officials that UNDRO should be abolished, recommended halving its staff, [and] restricting its brief to 'sudden natural disasters ...'"

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, **1995**, pp. 289-291, [291].

The JIU report was "Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator", JIU/REP/80/11, Geneva, **October 1980**.

The General Assembly persistently ignored this performance failure. In 1982, it reaffirmed UNDRO as the "focal point" for UN coordination and agreed euphemistically to "strengthen" it. After the UN failed to alert the world to the Ethiopian famine in 1984, Ms. Righter cited a small new unit that was set up as the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA). It established a strong team and computerized disaster resource allocations, and gained the enthusiastic support of the major donors and voluntary organizations. But after less than two years it was disbanded, having displeased other UN organizations. The General Assembly once again solemnly reaffirmed the importance of strengthening UNDRO.

Ms. Righter noted that in 1989 the General Assembly did draw up an "International Framework for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction" (Assembly resolution 44/236) and called for "strengthening further" the UN capacity to organize humanitarian assistance. In 1991, however, the Kurdish refugee crisis in northern Iraq impelled world leaders at the annual "Group of 7" summit to the extraordinary step of pressing the Secretary-General to designate a high-level official to coordinate future international emergency operations. Unfortunately, he had to rely largely on UNDRO resources, and the new effort became a mere fallback facility. Ms. Righter observed in 1995 that:

"It is time some lessons were learned. If the UN cannot provide the framework that the voluntary agencies and the governments that provide relief agree is needed, alternatives should be considered. [The 1971 report establishing UNDRO] ... stated bluntly that 'the principal organs equipped for international emergency relief are and will continue to be the League of Red Cross Societies, other voluntary organizations and church groups, and Governments ... the United Nations System is not geared for action of this kind, nor is it realistic to suppose that, given its structure, it could become so.' Where the UN could help was in ... promoting national disaster prevention and control measures ... assembling computerized data on conditions in disaster-prone countries ... and

on possible sources of assistance ... and negotiating with recipients as well as countries through which supplies would have to pass."

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1995, pp. 291-293, [293].

Ms. Righter concluded that this modest role was more appropriate. In peaceful countries disaster aid was usually government-to-government, and in obstructive disaster situations the UN is often hampered by protocol (80 percent of aid to war-torn Ethiopia and Eritrea came from voluntary organizations.) All relief agencies using voluntary funds receive considerable pressure from their donors to use it well, and the developed countries, which provide the bulk of relief funds, resources, and expertise, could surely coordinate resources needed and their use, perhaps through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1995, pp. 293-294.

In their concurrent and excellent report in 1994 on renewing the UN system, Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart concluded that in the area of humanitarian emergency machinery:

"... governments have for many years been trying to improve the operations of a number of separately established bodies that provide humanitarian emergency assistance. A major resolution in the right general direction was adopted by the General Assembly in 1991, but has manifestly been insufficient to overcome the separatism, competitiveness, and lack of coordination which governments have built up in this area ...It is time to end the tinkering.

... After many unsuccessful rounds of reform Member-States should recognize that the continued scattering of humanitarian emergency response capacities among separate funds does not and cannot enable the coordination that they have agreed is needed. ..."

Erskine Childers, with Brian Urquhart, "Renewing the United Nations System", Development Dialogue, 1994:1, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 1994, p. 203.

It is not clear whether the past decade has changed this rather discouraging picture in any substantive way, but the challenge of the enormous relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts required in the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster will certainly put the UN coordination processes to the test. In 1992 UNDRO was finally absorbed in a new Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which grew larger with some regular budget, but mostly voluntary, funding.

In 1998 the Department was transformed into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and reduced somewhat in size. Conveniently for the current tsunami challenge, it issued a report in November 2004 as requested by the General Assembly, on its evolution, current functions, ambitions, and desire for more "secure funding" to enhance its coordination work. The Assembly too has increased its

pronouncements on humanitarian disaster work and strategy, as shown by no less than four resolutions in late 2004 and early 2005.

The Secretariat report is:

"Defining the administrative functions of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/562 of **10 November 2004**.

The recent General Assembly resolutions are:

"International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development", 59/212 of **20 December 2004**,

"International strategy for disaster reduction", 59/231 of **22 December 2004**,

"Natural disasters and vulnerability", 59/233 of **22 December 2004**, and

"Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", 59/279 of **19 January 2005**.

Just as there is a "fog of war", there is also a "fog of disaster relief" (and of disaster funding and use). To identify some of the key entrenched elements before moving on to actual tsunami relief efforts in 2005, IO Watch wishes to provide a dozen or so quotes which illustrate the Secretariat's past experiences and struggles in this field.

"In ... international humanitarian efforts, United Nations relief undertakings -- greatly expanded in the nineteen-seventies, as the victims of prolonged conflicts and natural disasters multiplied --- were gratuitously obstructed by the U.N. pattern of subservience to governmental pressures, of administrative havoc, and of feuds nurtured within U.N. agencies themselves. While the public was encouraged to regard ...[a UN relief mission] as a concerted endeavor by the organization, devoted workers in the field were repeatedly frustrated in essential tasks by the confusion and politicization of a top-heavy headquarters bureaucracy. Nothing in the United Nations' attitudes and structure had prepared the system to respond with coordinated intelligence to an unprecedented volume of calamities -- which were associated, in Asia, with the dispersal of entire peoples and societies. Nor were correctives rationally applied..."

Shirley Hazzard, "Breaking Faith: II", The New Yorker, **October 2, 1989**, pp. 74-96, [76-77].

Note: Ms. Hazzard worked at the UN for ten years, resigning in 1962 to become a very successful full-time writer.]

" ... [The UN programs which eat] up the great bulk of U.N. resources ... the economic, social and humanitarian programs aimed at development, emergency relief and 'better standards of life' around the world ... [get little scrutiny.] ...

Clearly, the United Nations employs many hard-working and idealistic people. [But] ... parts of the system are overstaffed and lethargic, while others, particularly field offices in unpleasant places, are overstaffed and overworked. ...

Local employees tend to bear the brunt of disciplinary action ... when fraud or abuse are discovered ... while erring international professional staffers often survive and even advance in the organization. At the same time, U.N. employees who complain about irregularities [lose promotions or must transfer elsewhere.]

It is a system that tends to cover up its abuses and discourage whistle-blowers. ...

A European U.N. official, who recently left his agency in frustration, [said] 'A certain enabling environment ... allows {fraud} to happen. The question is not whether you do it or not, but whether you're stupid enough to be caught.'

"Basically, there's a lack of determination to combat the sleaze factor' he said. 'In an environment where mediocrity has a strong self-protective interest, these things flourish."

William Branigin, "The U.N. empire: polished image, tarnished reality", "As U.N. expands, so do its problems: Critics cite mismanagement, waste", Washington Post, **September 20, 1992**, pp. 3-4.

"[Concerning allegations of corruption at UNHCR in articles in the Washington Post in September 1992] with respect to discipline in UNHCR, a courageous staff member in Angola immediately brought the Boubakar wrongdoing to my attention. The case was airtight, and U.N. headquarters found it impossible to avoid our recommendation for dismissal.

In the more complicated Lukika case in Uganda, UNHCR's recommendation for dismissal was equally strong. The Secretary-General's office rejected it (on grounds that the United Nations lacks precedents in firing for incompetence) and forced UNHCR to take Lukika back. Threats and intimidation in no way dampened our efforts in UNHCR to deal with corruption and incompetence. The Secretary-General at the time just did not support us. Ensuing troubles with Lukika after headquarters directed that he stay in UNHCR should surprise no one."

Arthur E. Dewey, "No laxity", UN Special (Geneva), **November, 1992**, p. 31.

[emphasis added]

[Note: Mr. Dewey was deputy high commissioner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 1986-1990.]

"The United Nations is losing an estimated £270 m. each year because of corruption, waste and mismanagement, an investigation by the *Sunday Times* Insight team has discovered.

The new evidence of widespread financial abuse ... comes [from] ... 'Operation Irma', the trouble-ridden evacuation of wounded refugees from Bosnia.

The disclosures will fuel growing international criticism of the U.N. and its controversial refugee agency [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], accused of incompetence and red tape. ...

An estimated £1 m. has been raised in one week in public donations, but aid agencies are bitter and angry that hundreds of times that amount of cash has been squandered by the U.N. so far this year.

Jeffrey Clark, deputy director of the Refugee Policy Group, an international agency helping refugees in Bosnia, said: 'At the very moment when the U.N. needs to persuade people and governments to spend more on expanded operations its credibility is undermined by waste, mismanagement, ineptitude, and pure stupidity.'

Nick Rufford, Ian Burrell and David Leppard, "Scandal of U.N. 'lost' millions", The Sunday Times, **15 August 1993**, p. 1.

[The above are only a few of the comments on UNHCR among those excerpted in the UN Special (Geneva), October, 1993, pp. 20, 22, 27.]

"On the very day the Sunday Times published [the above] report, I received the news of the killing of one more UNHCR colleague, Boris Zeravcic, in Bosnia. The report failed to mention the sacrifices that the vast majority of the United Nations staff make, particularly the loss of life, while working in conflict situations.

The Staff Council in UNHCR agrees with the thrust of the criticisms. The staff wants to weed out corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, double-dippers, desk-warmers, and all other irregularities ... Staff representatives have been tirelessly pointing out unsavory management tendencies and reported to the governing body of UNHCR ... on how to strengthen the organization and to ensure the effective use of its human resources. The question is: what do these government representatives do with these reports when they return to their capitals ...

UNHCR ... staff on the ground work with dedication and have twice won the Nobel Peace Prize, but they are demoralized when subjected to unjustified criticism. UNHCR staff needs the help

of the media to further strengthen its humanitarian commitment to work for refugees."

Nasr Ishak, "HCR staff replies", UN Special (Geneva), **October 1993**, p. 20.

[Note: a reply letter to the *Sunday Times*, by the Chairman of the Staff Council, UNHCR].

" ... the bulk [of financial abuses] usually occurs ... in emergency operations where cash or supplies are being moved ... [urgently], or where contracts must be issued under great pressure. Given the appalling under-staffing of peacekeeping operations and the disorganized state of humanitarian emergency assistance the surprise if any is that there is not more fraud and waste in these operations. ...

A further ironic consequence of zero-growth demands has been the severe under-staffing of the Internal Audit Division [IAD.] ... neither Secretaries-General nor member states have paid enough attention ... [thus there have been only some 30 fully qualified auditors and 6 [professional evaluation staff] to cover the entire [UN] work programme in thousands of expenditure lines, carried out at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, five Regional Commissions, over a hundred country offices, huge world conferences and in addition over a dozen complex peacekeeping operations. ..."

Erskine Childers, with Brian Urquhart, "Renewing the United Nations system", Development Dialogue, 1994:1, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, **1994**, p. 146. SHELF

"As the leaders of every nation on earth mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations this week, they must do more than fill the General Assembly hall with platitudes Without significant changes in organization and behavior, the UN will lose its remaining effectiveness and public support.

On financial management, there has been significant progress in the last two years. The main problem now is the continued insistence of member countries on imposing expensive and unsuitable patronage appointees on the Secretariat and UN agencies. No political body is free of patronage, but profligate waste at headquarters while the UN and its agencies run out of funds to meet emergency human needs in the field is intolerable."

"A hard look", *The Washington Post*, in the International Herald Tribune, **October 24, 1995**.

" Africa has more than 3 million refugees and some 15 million internally displaced, a much higher number than 10 years ago. These outcasts strain the resources of host communities, and the goodwill of donors, yet there is no end to the stream of people fleeing for their lives.

The United Nations refugee relief agency is weakly managed and needs more oversight -- in part because member nations use it as a patronage pit -- and its dependence on host countries to provide services is another breeding ground for corruption. But the agency is dealing with a dangerous and difficult mission: 24 members of its staff, and 23 workers for the World Food Program, have been killed since 1992. The reluctance of donors has also crippled the agency, which finds it easier to raise money for emergency appeals than to alleviate the chronic miseries of most African refugees."

"Refugee crisis in Africa", *The New York Times*, in the International Herald Tribune, **June 17, 2000**.

"A former [senior official of the UN Commission for Human Rights, Alan Parra], told The Observer that the UN has 'an absurd and unaccountable system of abuse, embezzlement and ineptitude.'

[He said] 'It's very difficult to dig out and punish abuse in an organization where it is the norm. Of each dollar spent by the United Nations only an infinitesimal amount gets anywhere near

the project on the ground' . . .

Last week Parra described a series of cases that included: assistants to a senior official based in another country not realizing for more than a year that their superior had died; an official report on the human rights situation in Czechoslovakia, written by an overworked official by 'cutting and pasting' a report from Columbia.

'It told us all about guerillas and narco-traffickers. The words 'Czech Republic' had just been pasted in,' Parra said.

He also criticized 'an addiction to perks and luxury.' When one UN official in Rwanda had wanted to interview the Canadian general in charge of peacekeeping forces there he had been told to arrange an itinerary with stays on the way out and back in Brussels, Paris and Geneva, Parra claimed."

Jason Burke, et. al., "UN rocked by flood of fraud cases: Officials were 'addicted to luxury,'" The Observer International (UK), **September 3, 2000**.

Note: any such interviews with OIOS staff and dynamic results with criminal cases (see following item) seem to have come to an abrupt end since the 2000 report, as OIOS information on its investigation work became very low-key and vague.]

"There are several United Nations. There is the international body of nations which does so many tasks -- from vaccinating children to distributing food -- with considerable success. . . .

Another United Nations, perhaps the most intractable, was made up of the vast and largely autonomous baronies constituted by the various agencies which carry out the UN's development and relief work. . . . Undoubtedly they contained time servers, like the central secretariat itself . . . because of the quotas insisted upon by governments. Moreover, the agencies guarded their sovereignty as fiercely as any member state and fought any attempts to diminish their autonomy through coordination. Directors would not hesitate to call upon their own national governments to fight any attempt by the secretary-general to dismiss incompetent senior staff or to rationalize their cost. . . ."

William Shawcross, Deliver us from evil: Peacekeepers, warlords, and a world of endless conflict, Simon & Schuster, New York, **2000**, p. 227.

"Non-governmental organizations will become more numerous, prominent and powerful in 2001 than ever before. Now 30,000 international ones exist; 50 years ago, there were just a handful.

In poor countries they will multiply especially fast. An NGO is an efficient tool with which to harvest donor money. Rich governments have lost their appetite for handing over checks to poor, corrupt, and dictatorial regimes. So they hand them to NGOs instead. And not only money passes hands. In 2001 large numbers of expatriate (usually white) workers will be dispensing the aid and giving assistance.

.... aid groups will get more money for their work: between 1994 and 1997 the European Union's aid spending via NGOs rose from 47% to 67% of the relief budget.

Far harder to measure is their power. On some issues ... they will set the terms for public debate.

One sign of clout is how much annoyance they will cause.

Globally the bigger ones are already more influential than some smaller governments. They have large budgets and highly skilled staff.

They will also get a greater say in the UN"

Adam Roberts, "International: NGOs: New gods overseas", The world in 2001, The Economist, **2000**, pp. 73-74.

"The present United Nations programming and budgeting system is complex and labour-

intensive. It involves three separate committees, voluminous documentation and hundreds of meetings. Changes proposed ... include a medium-term plan covering only two years (rather than four) ...

The budget document itself would be less detailed and more strategic, and would give the Secretary-General some flexibility to move resources according to needs. Also ... intergovernmental review should henceforth be conducted exclusively in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly [rather than shared with the CPC] ... [and] measures will be taken to streamline peacekeeping budgets, and to improve the management of the large number of trust funds through which Member States provide voluntary contributions to supplement the regular budget."

"Strengthening of the United Nations: An agenda for further change: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/57/387 of **9 September 2002**, "Summary, section V."
[emphasis added.]

"The Secretariat's administrative environment is not fully leveraging the advantages of technology, nor is it applying modern process management practices adopted by other organizations. Many of the administrative processes are still manual, cumbersome, time-consuming, inefficient and costly to administer. In some cases, layers of control slow down the process without providing any real value."

"Review of duplication, complexity, and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures," UN document A/58/211 of **4 August 2003**, p. 2.

"In the world of international relief agencies, it's known as 'the fog of disaster.' Brought on by ... calamities, ... getting the necessary donations to buy the right supplies and get them to rescuers on the scene can be a bureaucratic nightmare. But [the Red Cross (IFRC)] has instituted a new web-based technology designed to cut through the confusion and paperwork of a crisis.

[It] Can track donations of money and supplies in real time ... [and] allows aid groups to make an instant and accurate accounting for every dollar a donor gives.

The software couldn't come at a better time. According to the World Disaster Report, 226 million people were hit by disasters in 2002. A study by the IFRC shows that the software [can] ... speed up the relief process by 20 to 30 percent."

"Technology: Online relief," Newsweek International, **September 15, 2003**.

"Iraq gets ... [the headlines and the most] aid money. ... But there are other crises that crave attention, many involving far worse suffering. So this week the UN issued a list of 21 forgotten disasters and appealed for \$3 billion to alleviate them.

... The only way to raise money, the UN reckons, is to lump ... [the countries concerned] together ...

The UN complains that donors ,, tend to have ... [their favorites]. True enough. ...

... The UN's own list shows a hint of bias, too: it asks for \$305m for the Palestinians, but only \$187m for Congo, though the death toll from Congo's war is more than 1,000 times greater than that during the *intifada*. ...

Since the UN never gets all the money it wants for disaster relief, some of its officials hint that donations should be compulsory. In a press release this week, for example, it mused that 'many humanitarians would like to see aid evolve from a free-floating act of kindness to an arrangement based on law.' It is not obvious that this is a good idea. ... [Money should go] where donors ... want it to, not where unselected bureaucrats choose."

"A United Nations appeal: Forgotten disasters", The Economist, **November 22nd 2003**.
[emphasis added.]

"Five years ago ... the Roll Back Malaria initiative (RBM) [was founded to] combat resurgent malaria in many [countries] ... Almost every major aid agency promised new funds. [Financing rose] ... from \$64 million in 1998 to a promised \$750 million by the end of 2000.

However, in 2002 ... international funding had reached only \$130 million.

... [A recent journal article grapples] ... with the disconnect between cost estimates, ambitious donation pronouncements, and the actual sums spent on malaria-related programs. [Its] conclusions are simple and depressing: Pledged donations are far lower than what most experts believe is needed; many pledges are not dispersed in full; and current program-management and accounting systems are so poor that no one can learn precisely what is being spent by whom, where, and on what. ...

[The authors conclude that] many donors remain unrepentant about their lax financial reporting habits. ...

Sadly, these findings are not surprising. In many domains ... collaboration ... often peaks at the pledging stage. ...

Malaria is more closely linked to global poverty than any other disease. ... The failure to track well-publicized RBM pledges is particularly reprehensible. Malaria and poverty will persist as donor commitments recede."

Phyllis Freeman and Anthony Robbins, "Disease deadbeats", Foreign Policy, **September/October 2003**, pp. 79-80.

The article itself is

Vasant Narasimhan and Amir Attaran, "Roll back malaria? The scarcity of international aid for malaria", Malaria Journal **2003**, 2:8, published 15 April 2003, available at www.malariajournal.com .]

"In 2002, the ... [OIOS] found that program managers and department and office heads were not complying with U.N. regulations. ... nearly half of program managers were not regularly monitoring and evaluating program performance. In addition, program managers were not held accountable for meeting program objectives because U.N. regulations prevent linking program effectiveness and impact with program managers' performance. U.N. officials told us that a more mature program monitoring and evaluation system is needed before program managers can be held responsible for program performance.

We found that there were a variety of problems ... Most programs do not have comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plans ... managers ... did not directly review ... [evaluation results] in [more than half of the] programmes surveyed in 2001 ... overall, evaluation findings were not used ...

The Secretary-General tasked the ... OIOS to develop a strategy to systematically evaluate and monitor programme results and to introduce information systems needed ... and expects to have a complete system by 2006."

U. S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February 2004**, pp. 19-23 [22-23]. [emphasis added.]

"The halo that appears to float over non-profit institutions - providing them with an aura of altruism - distracts attention from the basic fact that non-profits are, first and foremost, economic institutions ...

[An expert observes that to improve non-profits' management one must] view them as economic institutions with ... charitable missions ...

Managers of non-profit institutions understand that the organizations' survival depends on the managers' ability to secure a generous constituency. ...

The perception that non-profit organizations are small, fragile and non-threatening enterprises ... conceals their actual size, power, and competitive determination. [Their mythology

and self-portrayal as solely altruistic] ... *misinform the public and allow them ... to ensure a continued flow of salary and benefits for their managers and the preservation of the managers' power and status. ... [People need] ... to realize that ... the rule of caveat emptor applies even more importantly to transactions with non-profits than with marketplace transactions.* Typically, [in the] ... marketplace, one receives something in return [but, *with non-profits*] ... *individuals conduct transactions ... based entirely on faith. Such transactions are lamentable when one party is talking altruism but seeking self-interest. Who will protect generous - and gullible - donors?*"

Barry D. Friedman, "How non-profit organizations fight off competition: Who will protect non-profit donors?", *PA Times* (USA), **May 2004**, pp. 5-6. [emphasis added.]

[Note: IO Watch believes that the UN should also most definitely be recognized by everyone as an economic (fund-raising, self-preserving) organization in this sense. Its leadership -- both in the Secretariat and among Member State delegations -- certainly knows this, and has always behaved accordingly.]

The UN's efforts to play a leading role in tsunami disaster relief and subsequent stages, despite its own field operations problems and entrenched bureaucratic culture, are presented in the following quotes from late December 2004 onward. The resulting narrative is indeed a tangled one, but it provides many useful insights and reflections on "this time, let's get it right." Eventually, this record will provide important benchmarks to determine if and how well the UN performed its crucial coordination role.

"We are constantly reminded that we live in the era of globalisation. Never have people, information and money traveled so far and so fast. The [Indian Ocean tragedy] ... provides a heart-rending test of the world's ability to harness those forces to limit further suffering.

The numbers of foreign holidaymakers caught in the tsunami ... ensured the rest of the world paid attention to a disaster that, according to the United Nations, was unique in encompassing such a large area and so many countries. The brunt has been born by tens of thousands of nameless poor fishermen, their families and children. Whole communities have been wiped out.

Time is now of the essence for the UN, governments, aid agencies and individuals to prevent the catastrophe worsening as the death toll rises, the sea disgorges the dead, and fears grow that polluted drinking water and putrefying bodies will lead to disease. The UN says that hundreds of relief aircraft carrying emergency goods from about two dozen countries will arrive in the next 48 hours. Rescue teams, however, have only begun to reach remote areas."

"Asian disaster is a test for the world: Governments must respond rapidly and generously", *Financial Times* (UK), **December 29, 2004**.

"Officials in charge of the existing international tsunami warning system, which covers only the Pacific Ocean, have taken an initial step to broaden the network to the Indian Ocean and other possible trouble spots, agreeing to distribute their bulletins on earthquakes and possible waves 'to anyone who wants to receive the messages.'

Until now the messages had gone only to about 300 agencies and individual scientists tracking conditions mainly in the Pacific, which historically experienced 90 percent of the world's underwater earthquakes and tsunamis. ...

...The International Coordination Group for the Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific ... [has] 26 member nations [including] Indonesia and Thailand, which face the Indian Ocean.

Some tsunami experts had been pressing Indian Ocean countries in recent years to ... develop warning systems ... and others to broaden ...[the network's] geographic base.

The monitoring group created a team last year to assess Indian Ocean threats and build a warning network. But the current crisis came before anything concrete was done."

Andrew C. Revkin, "Alert network expands", International Herald Tribune, **January 3, 2005**.

"[The Indian Ocean tsunami exacted] ... a terrible price in human lives. But ... future catastrophes may be far grimmer. ...

The world has already seen a sharp increase in such 'natural' disasters -- from about 100 per year in the early 1960s to as many as 500 per year by the early 2000's. ... [But] what has changed is where people live and how they live there, say many experts ...

As new technology allows, or as poverty demands, rich and poor alike have pushed into soggy flood plains or drought-ridden deserts, built on impossibly steep slopes, and created vast, fragile cities along fault lines.

In that sense, catastrophes are as much the result of human choices as they are of geology or hydrology. ...

... Tear-fund, a Christian relief agency based in [England, found in a study] ... that less than 10 percent of the money spent on disaster relief ... goes to preventive measures. Mozambique, anticipating major flooding in 2002, asked for \$2.7 million to make basic emergency preparations. It received only half that ... from donor organizations. After the flood, those same organizations ended up committing \$550 million in emergency assistance."

Andrew C. Revkin, "Disasters ahead may be worse: Preventive measures are often not taken", International Herald Tribune, **January 3, 2005**.

"With aid now piling up in warehouses and on tarmacs around the Indian Ocean, officials are trying to avert a second potential tragedy ...

All too often, a surplus of good intentions leads to ... 'the anarchy of altruism' that produces waste, duplication, and frustration.

Allison des Forges of ... Human Rights Watch ... said: 'The problem is mostly how to scramble and deliver aid in a very short time when you have lots of independent agencies, each of which has its own agenda as well as the larger common agenda involved.' ...

Relief officials are closely watching the [the Bush administration's attempt to develop a] ... coalition of donor governments ... to coordinate help ...

[An Oxfam adviser said] ... 'We are happy to see [efforts at] ... long-term donor and logistical support for this operation ... But it's critical that this] ... [be] integrated into what the United Nations is doing and not operating as a special, separate coordinating effort.' ...

Des Forges said, ... 'I think its fair to say that [the UN's] OCHA has grown in its sophistication and knowledge of how to manage complex emergencies."

Stephanie Strom, "Relief officials work to coordinate an overwhelming response", International Herald Tribune, **January 4, 2005**.

"The greatest outpouring of disaster relief on record has been promised for the victims of the worst natural disaster of our time, a stupendous display of good will and empathy ...

The foremost challenge now is to ensure that the money pledged in the glow of the media spotlight gets to the people who need it. That is the job of the United Nations, which has a chance to redeem itself after the oil-for-food scandal. It must make sure that the money is not diverted into the hands of corrupt government officials or used as a political weapon by armies waging counter-insurgency campaigns in some of the most stricken areas.

... Complaints have already arisen about [Indonesian] soldiers siphoning off supplies for their relatives and friends. But Indonesian government officials bear some blame ...

[Further,] the aid to the tsunami victims must not come out of the same pot used for development aid. It's clear that in the yearly lottery of disaster aid, the tsunami survivors will get the

most. But that doesn't mean that the eight million people who die every year from preventable diseases like malaria should end up like losers -- again."

"Delivering needed aid, today and tomorrow, International Herald Tribune, **January 5, 2005**.

"The basic dilemma for aid agencies after the tsunami is how to help without undermining local governments and charities ...

Lack of co-ordination is the most immediate challenge. The only institution that has the capacity and political status to organize such an international effort is the United Nations. ...

It will be an uphill struggle. OCHA ... is desperately short of money and trained personnel. It is currently undergoing a review, ordered by Jan Egeland, its Norwegian head, to identify what is wrong with its speed and effectiveness, particularly in the light of the world's disorganized response to the Darfur crisis in Sudan. It is too early for any results. ...

Yet perhaps the greatest dilemma for aid agencies is how to help ... without undermining the local government and indigenous charities that will always be the first line of defence.

If the local institutions are not encouraged and reinforced, there will be no one to take over when the aid workers leave.

All of the Asian countries hit by the tsunamis have well-established institutions. ... They do not want to be invaded by an army of aid workers. They just need help to help themselves."

Quentin Peel, "Help should have a light touch", Financial Times (UK), **January 6, 2005**.

"Secretary-General Kofi Annan ... made an urgent plea to world leaders gathered [in Jakarta] Thursday to make immediate cash donations of \$977 million to provide water, food, shelter and medicine to the tsunami victims.

... A total of more than \$3 billion has been pledged by countries around the world ...

Annan called the tsunami 'an unprecedented global catastrophe,' the largest natural disaster the United Nations has faced in the 60 years of its existence. ...

The very scale of the money pledged ... has raised questions about how it will be managed and spent.

We don't need a donors' conference -- we need a logistics conference,' a European ambassador said.

'Everyone agrees with that,' a senior American official said. He added that America was insisting on 'accountability,' which is the diplomatic way of acknowledging 'corruption.' ...

Corruption has been endemic in Indonesia, starting with senior officials and filtering down to the civil servants who deal with the public. ...

The hope is that 95 cents of each donated dollar gets out to the people, [the American official said.] An Asian diplomat with long experience in Indonesia put the figure at 90 cents on the dollar."

Scott Shane and Raymond Bonner, "Annan tells donors to make good on pledges", International Herald Tribune, **January 7, 2005**. [emphasis added.]

"... Humanitarian agencies are learning lessons from business in bringing essential supplies to regions hit by the tsunami ...

Hitting the spot: delivering the right aid to where it is needed makes managing a commercial supply chain look easy ...

'The old idea that disaster preparedness meant filling up your warehouse is disappearing.'

HOW TO COMBAT THE DIFFICULTIES OF DISTRIBUTING AID:

- Demand for supplies is unstable, from unknown locations at unpredictable times ... [use flexibility] ... outsourcing arrangements ... [and] local suppliers.
- Unsolicited donations clog up [everything] ... encourage donors to give money, not

goods. [Information technology] systems help to manage donated goods, allowing relief workers to prioritise distribution ...

- Supplies arrive [with] ... non-standard labeling ... Use .. colour-coding systems ... [and, if possible] uniform labeling of supplies.
- Lack of coordination ... leads to duplication and confusion at the 'last mile' ... Initiatives have emerged, such as [information management and pooling expensive assets by the UN] Joint Logistics Centre ...
- ... Logistics software provides an electronic trail ... [to] capitalize on past experience ... However ... more agencies [need] to treat logistics as a strategic function at the heart of their operations."

Sarah Murray, "Supply chain logistics" How to deliver on the promises", Financial Times (UK), **January 7, 2005**.

"Kofi Annan lands in ... Banda Aceh today amid growing [aid agency criticism] ... over what they say is the UN's inability to coordinate ... dozens of aid groups in and around Banda Aceh more than a week and a half after the tsunami hit the region.

"If we wait for the UN ... we wouldn't do anything' [said a Malaysian official.] ' ... There are people who are hungry and angry. ... So we just do it.'

... Much of [the largest relief operation in history] has been focused on Aceh province, where at least 85,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands made homeless. ...

[Many] representatives of aid groups ... drew attention to the fact that the UN has no staff at Banda Aceh airport, which is the focal point for the relief response.

Michael Elmquist, head of the [UN OCHA in Indonesia] ... admitted the UN's response had encountered difficulties ...

[He attributed them to] the sheer destruction and number of people killed ...; lack of telecommunications in the early days; a lack of truck drivers and fuel; the obliteration of the local government; and Aceh's troubled history [because of its long-running separatist Islamic insurgency.]"

David Ibison and Jake Lloyd Smith in Banda Aceh, "UN 'failing to co-ordinate relief efforts'", The Financial Times (UK), **January 7, 2005**.

"The world's response to the horrors wrought by the Indian Ocean tsunami has been extraordinary. ... The task now will be to make that generosity count, in an enduring way.

A sort of contest has broken out among governments, as they pledge ever more aid ...

To some extent, the unusually generous response ... may reflect a widespread, and largely justified, belief in rich countries that their money is more likely to be spent well on relieving natural disasters than on man-made humanitarian crises ... or, for that matter, on general development aid to the world's poorest countries. ...

Yet although the relief effort seems to be going reasonably well ... some legitimate concerns have been raised about whether the global system for responding to humanitarian aid is as efficient as it could be. In particular, the somewhat ponderous initial response has reinforced the case for an emergency rapid-response capability, consisting of soldiers, equipment, medical staff and others in a number of countries all over the world, doing their normal jobs but earmarked for dispatch when a disaster occurs. Moreover, the UN's difficulty last week in offering speedy co-ordination showed that that issue too needs attention."

"Helping the survivors: Relief is getting through, mostly. Longer-term reconstruction will be more difficult", The Economist, **January 8th, 2005**, pp. 9-10.

" ... Aid given after a natural disaster is pure, an affirmation of the best of the human spirit, uncontaminated by politics. That's what used to be said ... [but it deserves] reexamination after

Asia's catastrophe. ...

... The first politicization ... was governments using [tsunami aid] to win votes at home. ...
Then came the use of aid to score old points. ...

[Then] the aid issue was being used to peddle some pet schemes. ...

Meanwhile umpteen aid agencies have joined the cause. ...

But who was in charge? No one. At the summit in Jakarta, a powerful array of world leaders pledged to put their contributions through the UN; until then, only rough coordination efforts had been carried out ...

...If good is to come of the disaster it will come of wider lessons learned. ... The UN ... has more experience ... but it is a sprawling group of agencies with no resources worth speaking of other than those of its member countries. Somehow power and experience must be married and, with the help of the [US], EU, Japan, and others, persuaded to set up a standing disaster-response unit that can act on short notice."

"More generous than thou: Emergency aid is proving just as politically charged as any other kind", The Economist, **January 8th, 2005**, pp. 27-28.

" As the death toll from the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami reached 160,000, the largest United Nations relief effort ever mounted for a natural disaster moved into overdrive today ... as the crisis entered its third week. ...

Earlier today the UN opened a Joint Disaster Management Centre (DMC) set up with the Indonesian Government in Jakarta, the capital, calling it 'crucial for earmarking available resources' and for ensuring that the Government and the UN 'are working with the same baseline data on the affected people -- who they are and what their needs are.'

Meanwhile, Secretary-General Kofi Annan continued his tour of the region [and appeals for funds] ...

'I think the first test will come on the 11th (tomorrow) in Geneva, where we are having a pledging conference', Mr. Annan [said. ... The conference, to be attended by ministers from at least 30 donor and affected countries, will determine priority needs for the next six months ,,,

[A senior OCHA official] ... said the accounting firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers had offered its services to the UN free of charge to help improve tracking the aid and assist in any credible allegations of fraud, waste or abuse that might arise."

"As tsunami relief effort moves into third week, UN operation gathers momentum", UN News Service, **10 January, 2005**.

"... All too often when disaster strikes -- in Honduras [where mudslides after a hurricane created devastation in 1999] to Iran where the ancient city of Bam was shattered ... , to Mozambique which endured floods in 2000 -- that mission seems to last only as long as the media attention.

'Maybe this tsunami crisis could be used as a vehicle to educate ourselves about the importance of staying the course,' [said an expert, Eric Schwarz.] ...

Abby Stoddard, a research assistant at the Center on International Cooperation said, 'In general, relief funds are disbursed quicker than recovery funds, which are needed after the cameras go away ... there is no mechanism for holding governments accountable for living up to their pledges.'

That pattern was apparent in Iran, too. A year after an earthquake ... destroyed the central city of Bam, killing more than 40,000 people and leaving almost as many homeless, the streets there are still strewn with rubble. ...

The authorities there promised to have the ancient city rebuilt by now. ...

Iranian officials reported that they had received only \$17 million of the \$1 billion pledged by the international community to help rebuild ..."

Ginger Thompson and Nazila Fahti in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, "Aid is often fleeing at scenes of disasters", International Herald Tribune, **January 12, 2005**. [emphasis added.]

"The United Nations assured international donors today that it would do everything possible to ensure accountability of the huge tsunami relief operation and pledged immediate investigation of any allegations of mishandling of funds."

... The UN is keen to avoid any repetition of the alleged mishandling of funds ... in the oil-for-food programme for Iraq, and recipient countries promised their spending would be open to scrutiny.

"We want to be held accountable as agencies working on the ground," and we also want donors to be accountable for what they promised and actually delivered,' [OCHA head Jan] Egeland said.

About \$300 [million] of the more than \$5 [billion] pledged has been released to the UN so far. ...

[He] compared the international response to the tsunami appeal with the shortfall in funding for other 'forgotten' emergencies.

A \$1.7 [billion] UN appeal launched in December to help 26m people caught up in 14 crises around the world, including Darfur, Sudan and ... Congo, was also reviewed in Geneva yesterday.

In 2004, only 60 percent of a similar UN appeal was funded."

Frances Williams, "UN vows openness on handling of tsunami donations", Financial Times (UK), **January 12, 2005**. [emphasis added.]

[Note: And so, "the die has been cast." How will all this look in retrospect in, say, 2007?]

"In December 2004] President George W. Bush ... [announced] a 'core group' comprising the US, Australia, India and Japan -- to coordinate [tsunami aid, but a week later it was disbanded] ... in favour of working with the UN ...

[An Oxfam official said,] 'All our experience is that where the UN has the leadership in place, and has the respect and authority ...we get a very well co-ordinated and ... effective humanitarian response ...

[Where not, it usually ends up as a mess.]

This time, diplomats and aid groups say, the UN responded swiftly and effectively ... and [OCHA head Jan Egeland is] ... firmly in charge

The UN's backers also argue that it alone has the expertise and legitimacy to oversee the ... [half a dozen UN agencies, all the Red Cross groups, hundreds of international NGOs and thousands of local ones, and host governments and donors.]

Mr. Egeland said that ... in addition to the UN's internal accounting and auditing system, he has asked experts from PwC, the accounting and consultancy firm, to devise a system for the internet that would enable the broader public to track the flow of money 'from pledge to project.'

Frances Williams, "UN tsunami response 'proves a point': Supporters argue the organization alone has expertise to oversee response to disasters", Financial Times (UK), **January 12, 2005**.

"As world governments prepare to channel hundreds of millions of aid dollars to the tsunami-ravaged regions of Aceh province, Indonesia's culture of corruption has emerged as a major concern.

The US Ambassador ...said the Indonesian government had retained the American accounting firm Ernst & Young to audit the foreign aid being sent for the reconstruction.

A day-long seminar Wednesday on corruption here, a joint effort by the [UN, the Indonesian government, and several NGOs] ... was welcomed ...

The corruption here starts at the top. ... It is taken for granted that no one does business in Indonesia without paying bribes, routinely disguised as 'consultant's fees' ...

Even before the tsunami, Indonesia's president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former army general, had promised a campaign against corruption ...

... He is not placing any trust in his government agencies. Rather, he has turned to a non-governmental agency, Indonesia Corruption Watch, for help, asking it to set up a program for monitoring the aid to Aceh

The problems will not surface immediately in the emergency relief phase, [the Watch organization's head said] ... The opportunities for serious theft will come in the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase ..."

Raymond Bonner, "Jakarta's culture of graft worries donors", International Herald Tribune, **January 14, 2005**. [emphasis added.]

[Note: Here, unlike the Iraq oil-for-food programme, the corruption battle is highlighted early and frankly as a major problem in the UN tsunami aid operation. This archive's subsections on Internal Oversight: the OIOS , The UN, Alone and UNaccountable , and Other Major Problems , and several quotes which follow below make it clear that the UN, with its entrenched weaknesses in fighting corruption, meets a powerful and influential country with entrenched corruption, in its most corrupt and war-torn area. Although the UN has some professional auditors (PwC and Ernst & Young) and a local NGO in its corner this time, the battle will be a tough one. UN officials proclaim their readiness to be held fully accountable, and UN operational credibility is again, but this time quite openly, on the line.]

"A plan to build a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean began to take shape yesterday as the United Nations [said] ... it was the only body that could coordinate such a complex multilateral effort [at a conference on natural disasters in Kobe, Japan.]

UN experts said they could have a basic system working in the Indian Ocean within 18 months. This could be extended to the Caribbean, Mediterranean and still-vulnerable islands in the Pacific a year after that.

Unesco's intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission ... and the World Meteorological Organization would lead the technical process ...

Other agencies and donor countries would contribute, including training staff ...

Although donors, including Germany, Japan, and China, were still jostling for attention yesterday, most representatives said the UN had a vital role to play. ...

A blueprint had existed for a decade, said a [UN official], but had never been implemented because of the perceived low risk.

[Red Cross officials] ... said the Kobe conference ... had failed to set clear targets for reducing disaster-related fatalities.

'There is still time for a positive outcome, but there is a very real danger that all we will get is rhetoric', it said. ..."

David Pilling, "UN takes the lead in tsunami warning system", Financial Times (UK), **January 21, 2005**.

[Note: In the larger context of corruption-fighting, and the leading role to be given the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in this process, IO Watch must note that three weeks later an article revealed a criminal investigation underway of a bizarre, multi-year, multi-million dollar theft by a financial officer of WMO training funds. A harried UN spokesman in New York, already under fire for the oil-for-food scandal revelations, said it was WMO's problem, but, as in this instance, it continues to be the world's problem in a very important global operation. The article, by Judith Miller, is "Another UN arm, its weather agency, rocked by fraud", International Herald Tribune, **February 10, 2005**.]

"A month after the Asian tsunami disaster took the lives of more than 200,000 people ... the relief effort [in] ... Indonesia's Aceh province remains 'chaotic', according to a new report ... [by an inter-agency team led by the WHO, which] points to co-ordination problems that have hampered the delivery of medical help and food to survivors. ...

The frank assessment, the first serious report ... since the December 26 disaster ... [says that] food distribution ... occurred without any special effort to target vulnerable populations such as

children and the elderly.

... Sanitation problems remained a big concern, particularly in [crowded] camps without latrines and other basic facilities.

The delivery of medical aid has also been hampered by poor co-ordination ... [and] the absence of a master list for medical supplies resulted in [both gluts and shortages] ...

Improved co-ordination and UN leadership were essential, the report concluded, with ... a more robust presence needed from UN agencies in areas with big concentrations of survivors ... [and to] 'better prioritise' the delivery of aid.

The report comes at a critical time as Jakarta and aid workers prepare to shift into longer-term rehabilitation programmes"

Shawn Donnan, "Aceh relief efforts 'chaotic', says UN", Financial Times (UK), **January 24, 2005**.

Note: Discussion of this topic continues in the subsection on UN coordination of tsunami aid?, II.