IU Responds to the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster

On January 13, 2005, Indiana University Bloomington responded to the devastating December earthquake and tsunami that ravaged the coastlines of the Indian Ocean by holding a public forum to examine the causes and consequences of this unprecedented global disaster. IUB Chancellor Kenneth Gros Louis spoke before a packed audience: “We are here tonight to try to understand, to join our community to the many communities affected by this disaster, to hear personal stories, to draw love from our hearts and financial support from our resources, to bring some small measure of comfort and help to those we now know are our neighbors.”

The special guest was Peter Kovach of the State Department’s Bureau of Southeast Asia and Pacific Affairs. IU professors who spoke on the scientific, social, political, and humanitarian aspects of the disaster were Michael Hamburger (Geological Sciences), an expert on earthquakes; Margaret Sutton (School of Education), a specialist on Indonesia; and Sandeep Junnarkar (School of Journalism), addressing media coverage. Panel discussants were Patrick O’Meara, dean for international programs; Sumit Ganguly, director of the India Studies Program; and Maria Montessori, visiting professor from the State University of Padang in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Since then, IU Bloomington has hosted or sponsored numerous educational and cultural events in the intervening months to keep up community awareness of the tragedy and its aftermath and to encourage continued community giving to the enormous relief efforts being mounted worldwide by international agencies. Among the events and activities in March alone—from most recent to earlier—were the following:

- an interactive videoconference, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Global Change, that connected IU students with citizens and World Bank leaders in New Delhi to discuss the recently released UN Millennium Report on promoting world development;
- a seminar presented by Leslie Lenkowsky, a philanthropy specialist at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, speaking on humanitarian aid in Asia;
- a “Tapestry of Song” Benefit Concert performed by women from a wide vocal repertoire and styles that included jazz, folk, musicals, art songs, and American gospels, with benefits going to rebuilding schools in Aceh, Indonesia;
- a benefit dinner sponsored by the Asian Culture Center and various student organizations with proceeds to benefit efforts in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka;
- a public lecture by His Excellency Dr. Kasit Piromya, Thailand’s Ambassador to the United States speaking on “U.S.—Thai Relations: Elections, Trade, Tsunami.” He also met with members of the Thai Student Association and spoke with faculty and administrators at IUPUI.

Between the months of January and February, the campus hosted 18 additional events.

IU Bloomington has a dedicated Web site that helps to coordinate activities and donations, and refers to other resources regarding the tsunami (see below).

Other IU campuses responded to the tragedy by developing informative Web sites regarding the countries affected, scientific explanations, how to contribute, and local fundraising events. Some instructors developed special classroom assignments that focused on aspects of the disaster relevant to their disciplines.

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For more information: www.indiana.edu/~tsunami