



A Responsibility to Respond

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Abstract: *OMF International has extensive Christian ministries in the stricken countries and we asked Nick Cole, OMF UK's Communications Manager to comment on the disaster and the way OMF is responding.*

Naturally from the start most initial enquiries were about the safety of OMF personnel but this soon widened into questions about the more general implications of the disaster and how OMF was responding. Mercifully OMF staff, local and expatriate, survived because they do not live and work in the directly affected areas. Friends of OMF in those areas were also unharmed. Now many of them and OMF workers are gearing up to help in whatever way they can. Sometimes it comes right down to digging people's personal possessions out of the mud so that they can begin to set up home again. The psychological impact on all those who are involved is bound to be profound.

Expatriates who have been working for many years in the affected countries may also have a role in getting alongside newly arrived NGO personnel who may not understand the fragility of the infrastructure and the importance of cross cultural sensitivity as they go about their work. For everybody there is going to be a need of extra resources to support people psychologically and spiritually in their work. What, after all, is appropriate member care for people working in disaster areas?

With regard to support from this country, people should give to the appropriate NGOs or the Disasters Emergency Committee since OMF is not specifically a relief agency. But OMF does plan to be part of the long-term rebuilding through its on-going emphasis on holistic ministries. Of course there is a danger of 'milking' the situation and for a mission which has a traditional and strong commitment to evangelism and church planting there will need to be sensitivity. At the moment professional relief and development is the priority, not explicit evangelism. Certainly Muslim leaders will be on the look out for anything that hints at 'incentives'. The influx of new Christian visitors may make them even more nervous than usual.

Prayer remains a priority and something which OMF profoundly believes in and has traditionally promoted. It is in this respect that good may come out of the evil. The disaster may bring into focus peoples whose image has hitherto been obscured, political tensions may be eased, new social and economic freedoms may emerge. We need to pray about this. See www.omf.org.uk/aceh for more detailed prayer information.

Finally this may be an opportunity for Christian workers to be prepared to operate 'outside the box' because of a new situation. While we need to ask the Holy Spirit to control and moderate our knee-jerk and inexperienced reactions, it is necessary that OMF and others who want to help 'have a go'. Our supporters rightly expect this of us, and so does God, who identifies with this suffering world.

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