

SAWSO India tsunami relief projects update

An auditor in the field

Lt. John Waterton reports on a trip to India. –

The scene at the front of the hall as grateful families stand with trees and keys to new homes

On December 26, 2004 an underwater earthquake—9.0 on the Richter scale—struck off the coast of Indonesia. The most powerful quake registered in over four decades, it triggered a tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people and devastated 12 countries. Millions of people were displaced from their homes.

The Salvation Army—already established in many of the affected areas—was first on the scene in many communities. Funds poured in to support the Army's efforts; at the time of the Army's Tsunami Update: 9 months on..., the donations totaled over \$43 million.

Today, with public attention focused elsewhere, The Salvation Army is still at work with tsunami survivors, helping them rebuild and develop sources of livelihood.

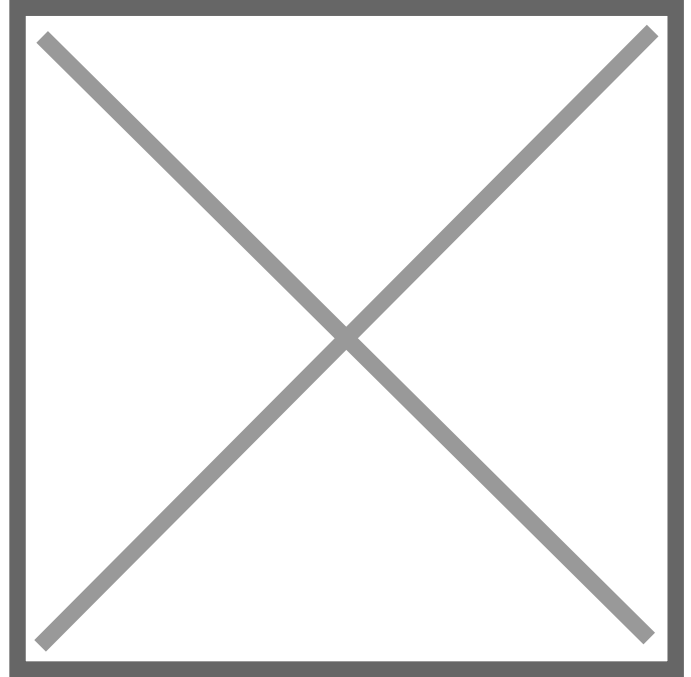
Now retired, the Western Territory's Lt. John Waterton continues to serve The Salvation Army as an auditor. In the following account, he describes what he thought would be a more-or-less routine overseas audit assignment.

Last summer, while I was working with SAWSO (Salvation Army World Services Organization) in Alexandria, Virginia, implementing their Microsoft Dynamics (formerly Great Plains) accounting system, Lt Colonel Dan Starrett asked me if I would have any interest in traveling overseas to conduct audits of SAWSO projects. I responded affirmatively; I would definitely be interested.

Deskwork

An opportunity arrived quickly, and in November I had the privilege of spending 10 days in Medan, Indonesia auditing tsunami projects.

More recently, in March, I was assigned to be part of a team to audit tsunami projects in two Territories in India: India North in New Delhi and India Central in Chennai (formerly Madras). I was anticipating spending a week in each place sitting at a desk auditing the accounting records of the projects.



I met up with Jun Villanueva, SAWSO tsunami fund accountant and Matthew Smith, SAWSO program director for India, in Frankfurt, Germany, and we traveled to New Delhi. There we found that we were not just going to audit for a week, but would be traveling to the Andaman Islands to actually see the projects and meet the clients.

After a few days in New Delhi auditing the records, we left to fly to Andaman Islands. They are off the coast of Thailand but are part of the Indian Territory.

In the field—Andaman Island

In Port Blair, the major center on Andaman Island, we learned that the damage done by the original earthquake was eventually more devastating than the damage created by the resulting tsunami. The south end of the island actually slipped lower so that at high tide salt water covers most of the rice paddies and agricultural fields, making them unusable. To make matters worse, that salt water is now seeping down towards the aquifers that provide the domestic water supply. A greater disaster is coming as that happens.

We were able to visit a number of the 80 houses that have been built by The Salvation Army for tsunami victims. We also visited a temporary housing center utilizing metal buildings in tropical temperatures. There are about 200-plus families still being sheltered here, waiting for permanent housing.

In the community hall at this site, we met with a group of women who are participating in the Self Help Groups program—an entrepreneurial program that encourages moneymaking projects. Each group of three women was given 10,000 rupees to seed their enterprise. One group proudly showed us their bank account balance, which was now 89,000 rupees.

We were well taken care of by Colonel K. V. Lahase, territorial commander, and Major Y. Manoharan, territorial finance secretary.

India Central Territory—Chennai

Following a wonderful weekend in the Andaman Islands we moved on to Chennai and the India Central Territory. Here we were informed that the Territorial Commander, Colonel Emmanuel, had arranged a road trip to a number of fishing villages 450 kilometers north of Chennai, where The Salvation Army had been constructing houses for the tsunami victims.

We visited three villages, Gilakaladindi, in the Machilipatnam mandal, where we dedicated the community hall and tsunami officer quarters; Campbellpet, also in Machilipatnam, where we dedicated 37 new houses; and Mypadu, in Nellore, where we dedicated 39 new houses.

In the latter two villages I was privileged to present keys to their new homes to a number of tsunami victim families. Just to see the tears of joy in their eyes as they took possession of a two-room, bare concrete floor, 250-square-foot home with an outhouse toilet, was a very special experience.

We were told that in this territory the homes were actually built by the victim families under the direction of construction engineers.

Approximately 370 homes have been completed so far, with 330 more to go. On the return trip we stopped by another village and were greeted warmly by the residents of a recently completed village of homes.

What was supposed to be two weeks of auditing turned out to be the trip of a lifetime. I observed not only SAWSO project dollars at work, but also God's hand, at work among the people.

I can report from personal experience how effectively your tsunami contributions are being used and

monitored by SAWSO.