

Switzerland's commitment following the tsunami in Thailand



In Thailand a considerable amount of infrastructures along the coast was destroyed. Most affected were fishing villages like on the islands of Ko Phra Thong and Ko Kho Khao. © SDC

Context

The end of 2014 will mark a full decade since the tsunami that devastated the coasts of Southeast Asia and parts of Africa on 26 December 2004. This disaster resulted in the death of 225,000 people and affected the lives of millions more in 13 countries on the rim of the Indian ocean from Indonesia to Somalia. People around the world expressed their solidarity with the victims, for whom Swiss public funds and private donations amounted to CHF 300 million. These funds were used for emergency relief and a rebuilding programme for the tsunami victims in Thailand, India, Indonesia, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

In Thailand the earthquake and subsequent tsunami resulted in about 8,000 deaths, with 3,000 reported missing. About half of the victims were tourists. The Thai authorities and the local population made a major effort to provide emergency relief and were thus able to rescue and assist many people, including a number of Swiss nationals.

A considerable amount of infrastructure along the coast was destroyed. Most affected were the fishing villages on the offshore islands. Many lost family members, their homes, boats and fishing gear.

The Thai authorities reacted quickly and purposefully so that in addition to the emergency relief, the crisis management of Swiss Humanitarian Aid and the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok were able to provide assistance to the Swiss nationals affected. Subsequently a project was launched in collaboration with the local authorities for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure and means of subsistence on the islands of Ko Phra Thong and Ko Kho Khao, 150 kilometres north of Phuket.

Swiss emergency aid

After the 2004 tsunami, Swiss Humanitarian Aid sent a rapid response team (RRT) to assess primary needs and initiate relief operations. To assist the onsite SDC coordinator, 11 experts from Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) and the disaster response pool of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) were deployed to help with consular, psychological and logistical aspects of the response.

The Confederation's representations abroad are able to respond to the urgent needs of Swiss citizens facing troubles. In Thailand the Swiss embassy in Bangkok opened a special office in Phuket for this purpose in collaboration with the SDC.

The following emergency measures were undertaken, at a cost of CHF 1 million:

- provision of medicines and medical supplies for 10,000 people for 3 months
- secondment of forensic experts from Switzerland to assist the Thai authorities in identifying the victims
- support for the Swiss embassy in carrying out the duties of consular protection, psychological care and the evacuation of any Swiss nationals affected

Rebuilding of fishing villages

In a second stage, the SDC used the funds available, including those of Swiss Solidarity, to rebuild four fishing villages on the islands of Ko Phra Thong and Ko Kho Khao. 27 houses, two schools, a health centre, three community centres, jetties and roads were rehabilitated. The reconstruction also included 73 fishing boats together with the necessary fishing gear. As well as rebuilding the infrastructure, the aim of the project was to assist in the population's return to the islands and to help families regain their economic independence through the creation of fish farms and vegetable gardens.

Following the completion of the infrastructure projects in 2008, a decline in the fish population, and improvements in living conditions and employment opportunities on the mainland redirected the focus of life for the islanders. This had a corresponding impact on the use of the infrastructure provided.



The SDC provided 73 fishing boats together with the necessary fishing gear. © SDC

Facts and Figures

CHF 3,000,000: total budget for the SDC assistance programme following the tsunami in Thailand.

Around **500** provisional travel documents were issued by the various Swiss representations

73 fishing boats were provided with appropriate fishing gear.

Collaboration of various units of the FDFA

When major natural disasters occur, Swiss Humanitarian Aid supports and complements the efforts of other units of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), particularly during the emergency relief phase. Coordination is ensured by Swiss Humanitarian Aid to ensure close cooperation between the various federal agencies and external actors.



Further information

SDC
 Swiss Humanitarian Aid and SHA
 Sägestrasse 77 Köniz, 3003 Bern
 Tel.: +41 31 322 31 24
 Fax: +41 31 324 16 94
 E-Mail: hh@deza.admin.ch