

Draft Action Proposal from the Tsunami Relief Trip Group

The Penn Tsunami Relief Trip, organized by a group of undergraduate volunteers in partnership with the Graduate School of Education, was a true success. The eighteen of us returned to Penn this semester with a greater understanding of the gravity of the situation on the ground in Sri Lanka and with a sense of purpose.

While the majority of our time in Sri Lanka was spent working on a housing development in Kalutara, on the West coast, we also had the opportunity to tour the western and southern coasts of the island. Working closely in conjunction with AFLAC international, a government approved charity in Sri Lanka, we saw firsthand the devastation caused by the tsunami. Furthermore, we witnessed the poor implementation of aid relief by both government and large non-governmental organizations. After talking to many victims and visiting several camps and new developments for refugees, we have come to the following conclusions as regards to any aid the University of Pennsylvania might be interested in providing.

1. *Any and all aid should be channeled through small, local charities and NGOs.* This serves to bypass both the bureaucratic red tape inherent in large organizations, as well as the high overhead costs large NGOs incur. Furthermore, local charities are mostly volunteer-run and employ local people, thereby helping the local economy instead of the global NGO market. Penn's money would make the most difference channeled through small NGOs.
2. *The core function of any donation or funding should be aimed towards an academic purpose.* Penn's core mission as an academic institution is to promote learning. This does not mean, however, that funds should be committed to building schools. According to some sources, almost all schools have already been rebuilt, and some predict that there will be more existing schools after the tsunami than before the tsunami. However, developing programs that enhance the educational opportunities of Sri Lankans affected by the tsunami should be of definite concern. This may pertain to:
 - a. Means of transportation to attend school
 - b. Weekly boarding facilities for those in rural areas
 - c. Recreation and technological facilities
 - d. The establishment of partner schools and institutions in tsunami-affected regions, with the aim of sending Penn students and faculty to Sri Lanka
 - e. As a broader method of development aid, not specifically related to the tsunami, the establishment of a Penn village (at surprisingly little cost) is a real possibility. The educational experience this could provide to future engineering, nursing, education, and business students and their faculty would be invaluable.
3. *We recommend AFLAC International as a primary partner in any aid.* While realizing there are many other organizations of equal merit operating in Sri Lanka, our experience with AFLAC has convinced us that they are an ethical and well-run charity with the ability and experience necessary to achieve almost any

project. Furthermore, AFLAC has been extraordinarily gracious with their time, and have already proved to be an invaluable resource to the Penn community.

We are confident that Penn will be able to make a real and significant contribution the tsunami relief effort, if aid is well-aimed and well timed.

Sincerely,

The Penn Tsunami Relief Group