

DON'T FORGET THE

World's Daily Disasters

Global tragedy did not begin or end with the 2004 tsunami. Seize a chance to commit to international giving.

BY MARC ROSS MANASHIL

Now that coverage of the tsunami is beginning to fade, it remains to be seen whether the impressive philanthropic response will translate into an increased long-term commitment to international philanthropic giving. For those giving globally for the first time, I hope that your response to this tragedy is only the beginning.

Not unlike the outpouring of donations that followed the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the tsunami disaster once again unleashed the tremendous generosity of Americans. Published giving estimates report that private donations from U.S. organizations and individuals for tsunami relief have passed the \$1 billion mark.

Our small public foundation was one of many that wanted to help. Following news of the disaster, we received an urgent appeal from one of our grantees in Sri Lanka and passed along the message to our network of donors. An e-mail that was originally sent out to a few hundred people soon got forwarded to their friends, family and colleagues around the country. Checks ranging from \$25 to \$5,000 began to pour into our office from people I had never met.

This outpouring of generosity has been one of the most inspiring experiences of my professional life. I feel a great sense of hope that when their hearts are touched, Americans will respond to

international disasters as they do to domestic ones. Yet I cannot help but wonder why other global tragedies have not produced the same level of response.

Slow, Steady Killers

In our rush to help tsunami victims, let us also not forget the countless others worldwide who are suffering and dying on a daily basis, many of whom are children. More than 10 million children die each year in the developing world, the vast majority from causes that could be prevented if only they received basic care, nutrition and medical treatment. HIV/AIDS claims the lives of 6,000 people every day, with another 8,000 becoming newly infected.

Those disasters may not receive the same intensity of media attention, because they are slow killers rather than the result of a single horrific act of nature. Yet, it only takes a few days for the death toll of children in developing countries to equal the estimated number of innocent people who perished from the tsunami.

War and genocide have also had a significant impact on innocent people the world over. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the International Rescue Committee estimates that nearly 4 million people have perished over the past six years (31,000 per month). The crisis in the Sudan has received more attention, but



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with at least 70,000 people killed and another 2 million displaced, the situation remains unsettled at best.

One can offer various theories to explain why the philanthropic response to the tsunami has been so immense compared to other global tragedies. Perhaps, something about natural disasters leads us to personally relate to the victims and imagine ourselves in a similar circumstance. Maybe it was the suddenness of the destruction or the helplessness of the victims who perished in a moment's notice—as we witnessed on September 11, 2001. Perhaps it was that the tsunami was an act of nature and not of humans. Maybe the intense media coverage

made the difference.

An Ounce of Prevention

My hope is that the philanthropic response to the tsunami is not a one-time foray into global giving until the next major natural disaster hits, but an opportunity for many to begin a lifelong commitment to international philanthropy. I hope the disaster will open our hearts and minds to solving global problems of poverty, war, human rights abuses and environmental destruction—I hope it motivates us not only to respond after the fact, but also to act now to prevent the world's daily disasters.

If you would like to devote some percentage of

your time and money to international causes, now is a great time to start. One way to get involved is by becoming a member of Grantmakers without Borders (www.internationaldonors.org), a network of funders committed to promoting global social change philanthropy. Consider forming or joining a global giving circle with The Clarence Foundation (www.theclarencefoundation.org). Attend one of the many conferences devoted to international philanthropy around the country or join one of the many globally focused affinity groups on an issue or region that resonates with you.

The post 9/11 environment has caused some donors to hesitate to engage in inter-

national giving. However, the greatest barriers to giving are psychological, not legal. There are strong support networks for donors who want to engage in cross-border philanthropy and some wonderful U.S.-based intermediaries that make international giving both highly accessible and influential. If responding to the tsunami was one of your first international donations, please consider making it an integral part of your philanthropic practice. **FN&C**

Marc Ross Manashil is executive director and co-founder of The Clarence Foundation, which promotes engaged international philanthropy by serving as a catalyst for globally focused giving circles.