

The majority of our work over the last six years has been to take humanitarian aid to Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia. However, our volunteers know no boundaries and Hope and Aid Direct continues to meet its mission statement by taking aid and themselves to Sri Lanka

Charles Storer, Jeff Gill and Nick Cooper flew out to Sri Lanka lunchtime Thursday 13 January 2005 to join other aid workers from [GOAL](#) to assist in the distribution of aid in Sri Lanka. Michael Kelly joined them the following weekend, he flew out Saturday to arrive in Sri Lanka on Sunday. If you would like to help the work of Hope and Aid Direct please contact us for details of how to do this mail@hopeandaiddirect.org.uk and how you can make your donation as gift aid, thereby increasing your donation by 28%.

Members and supporters of Hope and Direct, like the rest of the world have been distressed by the plight of the victims of the Tsunami in South East Asia. They have immediately responded to the disaster by organising for a load of 20 pallets of dried and extruded cereals and biscuit products, all fortified with extra vitamins, and with a years shelf life, to be collected and taken to the International Aid Trust who are based near Preston, Lancs., for shipping out to Sri Lanka.

October 2005 - an update



Two of our supporters donated £550 to be used on projects in Sri Lanka. This, and the photographs shown below, show how that money was used to help a Troop of Scouts and just how far the money went. GOAL also added some money to the total to buy a scouting tent, but unfortunately we don't have a photograph of it.



The Scouts with workers from GOAL

The area and buildings shown in the photo, is the school and its central pitch, which as you can see they are using for cricket, about which they are passionate, but the Tsunami covered this whole area up to a depth of about 3 feet - it is about half a mile from the sea front, where the waves came over the tops of palm trees destroying lives and buildings - most of these boys will have lost relatives, but the school and Scout Group were lucky just to have all their possessions washed away!





Update 1 - Charles Storer 23/01/05

Nick Cooper, Jeff Gill and Charles Storer arrived in Sri Lanka 10 days ago to work with GOAL.

Nick was immediately sent over to Amparra to help with relief there whilst Jeff was to look after all the IT concerns in Colombo along with Charles who is looking after all the operations logistics – transportation, accommodation etc.

The work has been intense for all three volunteers, with little respite. Charles travelled down to Matara on Saturday and said the coastline was devastated the whole length of the coast from Colombo down to Matara for 300 meters in land.

Today, Sunday 23 January, Michael Kelly arrived, and tomorrow from Colombo he will travel to Hambantoto to manage logistics in that area and Charles will return to Matara to manager logistics there. Meanwhile Nick is working in Amparra and Jeff continues his ever increasing IT workload in Colombo.

The Story – as it happened

Sit Rep 1 – Colombo Sri Lanka – Charles Storer 23/01/05

I'll try to provide further updates during the coming few weeks, but I am leaving for Ampara on the East coast tomorrow, and communications there are intermittent.

The coast seems to have sustained damage virtually all the way around the Island – a distance of some 1,000 Kilometres - In some places the damage has not been so bad, but in most places the sea pushed about 300 metres in-land destroying 90% of what was in its way – houses, hotels, railways, schools, shops, businesses, shanty towns, palm trees, boats, and people!

The devastation is total – strangely it looks like Kostanica Croatia did in 1996, or Vukovar in 1999; some buildings (and usually the Buddhist Temples which are bell shaped) left standing incongruously among surrounding rubble.

Apparently detailed maps and stats are available on the OCHA website, but hundreds of thousands of people seem to have been displaced – many now living with host families or in schools etc. I'm told that they found more bodies yesterday in Matara.

The cleanup has and is occurring very rapidly, and as a result disease is hopefully being avoided, (although I haven't yet been further east than Hambantota in the south). The 'emergency' is over. Water supplies are quite good, lots of emergency water tanks, and GOAL who we are working for have obtained a bowser from the water authorities and are refilling the tanks.

Medical aid was quickly on the scenes – the locals actually responded very quickly and we've found the government to actually be very effective. Given the huge number of International NGOs that have arrived – often after GOAL , and suffering from 'analysis paralysis' – it is to the government's credit that things are getting done. Having said that, co-ordination is a team leader nightmare! (For the moment, someone else's nightmare, for a change!)

Hope and Aid Direct is making a bit of a name for itself down here! We have four people here now, as Mike Kelly was able to join me, Jeff and Nick two days ago, and our skills are already being fully utilized: Jeff has taken over all IT responsibility for the Colombo HQ as well as each of three satellite teams. The communications and PC equipment that GOAL has bought locally is simply incredible, with microwave/ satellite, mobile phones and laptops for everyone office based. Nick seems to be leading the engineering team in Ampara and is the proverbial 'pig in shit'! So far he's drained a festering lagoon by stealing a digger and making an escape channel, built a road and a causeway, and he's currently getting fishing vessels back in the sea. Mike has been sent down to Ambalantota in the Hambantota district to supervise logistics (logs). I was supposed to be based in Colombo HQ where I've sourced three houses, bought equipment and sourced insurance for the eight Toyota Hilux double cab pick-ups that I'm taking delivery of this afternoon, then I was asked to go and take over as Logs in Matara, but because of problems across in Ampara, they now want me to go over there and take over the finance, as well as the Logs role.

Several others in the Hope and Aid Direct team have offered their services, and this just goes to show the level of commitment of them Hope and Aid Direct team. GOAL now has to look at people who can offer long term commitment, or those with particular skills they require. If opportunities arise, I will contact individuals, but to illustrate, we are in the process of trying to get a friend of Nick's out here who is an oceanographer!

We have had some hugely generous offers to send stuff out to us, and asking if we would like funds to support what we are doing. I should make a few comments on that too! This disaster emergency is unique, in that such huge donations have been given, that the Aid Agencies will almost certainly run out of projects before the funds run out. Indeed I would even suggest that DEC (Disasters Emergency committee) will not know what to do with huge surpluses, and the problem is going to be that those displaced will be re-housed in better accommodation than others not affected, and this will cause resentment. It's bound to be a difficult situation. Of course the other problem is going to be that Hope and Aid Direct and all the other NGO/Charities will find it even more difficult to raise much needed funds, and I suspect that the DEC will at some point have to get government permission to release funds for other purposes.

This is a commonly held view now among NGOs so my request would be that anyone wishing to help Hope and Aid Direct in what we are doing down here be asked if they would mind giving any funds to Hope and Aid Direct towards our continuing work on an unrestricted basis, so that we can use funds perhaps towards the bakery project in Kosovo.

As far as goods are concerned, Rotary boxes have been offered, but we have learned that the Sri Lankan government are distributing more or less exactly the contents of each box already anyway to each person displaced, so let's leave the Rotary boxes for other emergency situations. Apart from that, it seems to be a policy to buy locally as this improves the local economy.

GOAL has a great team down here. Projects include building 2,000 temporary shelters (such a high standard that other NGOs are already seeking advice from the GOALies), construction of a concrete block manufacturing facility already complete and in production in an area of jungle that was cleared for the purpose complete with water pumped from a well into a new water tower, construction of new pre-schools, boat repair and re-launching, trauma counselling and much more besides. I'm chatting to Johnnie McGlade who is out here from No Strings the other charity I help to run, about getting puppets made locally to entertain but also educate the children in topical trauma related issues. (I've sourced a puppet making company).

Update - Michael Kelly 31/01/05

When I arrived in Colombo as part of a four man team from Hope and Aid Direct, to assist with logistics I had expected to be deployed to one of the massive logistics facilities that have sprung up around the airport, but within an hour of arriving I was asked to move to the east coast of Sri Lanka to Hambantota district in the south of the island which is one of the areas worst affected by the Tsunami that hit on December 26. While the current official death toll claims 4,500 were killed when giant tidal waves washed over the low-lying coastal strip, survivors claim that this figure is a gross underestimate and that no one will ever know the real number of lives lost.

Hambantota district is located about 240 kilometres south of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo. One of the country's most remote and poorest regions, the majority of its population lead a hand-to-mouth existence surviving through fishing, small-scale agriculture, salt farming or tourism. Located next to Yale National Park, Sri Lanka's second largest wildlife reserve, the area attracts thousands of visitors each year.

I was not going there as a tourist but as part of the massive international effort mobilized around the world creating unprecedented cooperation between NGOs the military of dozens of countries and the survivors of the worst natural disaster ever recorded.

The devastating impact of the Tsunami has now pushed the area's population even deeper into the abyss. Today Hambantota is like a war zone with hundreds of pulverized homes and dwellings, upturned vehicles, uprooted telegraph and phone lines. The countless corpses that were floating in nearby lagoons and mangrove swamps have now either been removed in the massive clean up operation or as is feared by many locally merely sunk to the bottom, rendering the lagoons which were until the Tsunami struck the primary source of employment in the area and the waters that gave a livelihood for so long have now become the final resting place for so many of them.

My journey to Hambantota took almost 10 hours and although the road has been very effectively opened the scale of the destruction along the route is mind numbing, having seen towns devastated by the war in the Balkans I thought I would be in some way prepared by what I was to see. The utter devastation of the entire coastline of a country ranging from a minimum of 100 meters to up to two miles inland in some of the low lying areas. It was like someone had taken an eraser to the map and swiped it all away.

I joined the team from GOAL, an Irish Humanitarian Charity that has, like Hope and Aid Direct, close links with the Department for International Development. GOAL had set up a regional headquarter in a rice mill in the small town of Ambalantota, and had from the very beginning been directly involved with the recovery effort.

In this my first week here the team have been employing up to 300 local people to remove sand and debris from the sides of the roads, from the drainage channels, the ditches and the culverts so that when the rains come, the towns and remaining properties are not inundated with water once again. The engineer, Noel Ellard, overseeing this operation cut his civil engineering teeth working on the construction of the M4 between Newport and Cardiff and lived in Pencoed for a number of years.

Another team has been clearing the drainage canals around the small paddy fields that are so common here, so that when the rains do come the salt water left behind by the Tsunami will be flushed out and allow the paddy fields to recover.

A third project is the repair or replacement of kitchens and toilets that were damaged allowing some people to return to their homes and the provision of a 20 ft by 10 ft temporary shelter that can be erected close to the original home while they rebuild their lives.

The repair and replacement of boats in an area that was 80% dependant on fishing is of course a top priority but the Cash for Work projects allow these proud people to "earn" a living until such time they can return to the sea.

Little of the actual town of Hambantota is left standing with no water, electricity or telecommunications. The bus station, 17 buses and surrounding buildings were completely destroyed. One thousand houses along the Hambantota-Tissa road, town-council residences, shops and other buildings were wiped out. Many homes had two or three families living in them, and a large

Muslim community, which was located near the Hambantota harbour, was completely washed away. So powerful was the Tsunami that even houses located one kilometre inland were demolished.

When the Tsunami hit, hundreds of local people were visiting Sunday markets at Hambantota, Matara and other nearby town markets. In fact, an estimated two to three thousand people were promenading along Hambantota harbour when the tidal wave struck. The overwhelming majority of these would have died.

When the water mass flowed back everything in the bus station and around it, including the buses, three-wheeler vehicles and the buildings, along with people in and around, had been sucked away without a trace. It must have been an unbelievable and horrifying scene.

My job here is to keep the supplies and materials flowing to the engineers overseeing the recovery and reconstruction, The nearby town has a kind of "Klondike" feel to it with thousands of people coming and going, aid agencies buying up supplies and equipment at a boom rate, that said there is no evidence of profiteering and prices for building materials are being held at pretty much pre-Tsunami levels.

Whilst negotiating to buy 200 shovels, picks, hoes, brooms and wheel barrows a very well spoken young lady came to my aid and helped with the language difficulties, holiday phrase books don't help you order 200 wheel barrows!

Afterwards this young woman joined me for a cup of tea and I asked her about her experience during the Tsunami, She told me that she had been about to board a bus when the wave hit. She jumped clear but was swept nearly 500 yards inland and ended up clinging to a tree. She watched in horror as cars, trucks, three wheel taxis and even busses were swept away by the water as it returned to the sea. The bus she was about to board was one of the 17 that disappeared completely from the town centre never to be seen again.

It was obviously difficult for her to talk so as silence descended over our tea table in this island that remembers so fondly, and in so many ways its colonial past, I asked what her plans were for the future, she held my gaze and said to me "*there is no future, there is only today, yesterday is too sad to remember tomorrow is too painful to contemplate, we have to do everything today to make today better for everyone*". That was why she came to my aid in the market place she was trying to make today better.

I am grateful for all the support that we have received from Echo readers The Rotary Club of Cardiff Bay who's shelter boxes have been distributed to various communities along the coast and to my employers King Sturge Management who so kindly released me to play my part in the recovery operations here in Sri Lanka.

Michael Kelly - Saturday 12 February

Michael gave his final handover yesterday and will be arriving home, no doubt with some very sad, heartening, interesting and amusing stories of his time in Sri Lanka.