Voluntary targets are in place, but there is also recognition of the need for stronger, more comprehensive international cooperation. In some cases, regional cooperation can provide a way to achieve common goals on its own. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for stronger, more comprehensive international cooperation.

Turning Disasters into Peacemaking Opportunities

Michael Renner and Zoë Chafe

Over the span of just a few weeks in fall 2005, major disasters devastated the southern United States, Central America, and Pakistan/India, dominating international headlines. These events—less than a year after the massive Indian Ocean tsunami—provide dramatic evidence of the devastation that nature’s fury is capable of inflicting.

In New Orleans, streets flooded by crumbling artificial levees prevented thousands of stranded residents—from leaving the steaming, filthy stadium where they sought shelter from Hurricane Katrina. In Guatemala, relatives raced to find survivors in villages completely buried by landslides. And in the earthquake-shattered mountains of Pakistan, as planes of supplies from political rival India prepared to touch down, survivors struggled to find food and shelter in devastated towns.

As the world watched, what began as the stories of powerful storms and earthquakes slowly emerged as tales of immense human suffering, environmental destruction, and gross socioeconomic inequities—exposing the underbelly of rich and poor countries alike. These disasters have revealed, in horrific detail, that poverty and the decay of key ecosystems can make storms, floods, and earthquakes far more lethal.

Some disasters have had powerful political repercussions—sparking domestic upheaval and even civil war in some places, yet prompting cooperation and reconciliation in others. In August 1970, for instance, catastrophic floods claimed an estimated 300,000-500,000 lives in what was then the eastern province of Pakistan, today’s Bangladesh. Having long resented the political and military dominance of West Pakistan, many residents accused the government in Islamabad of botching relief efforts, being indifferent to their suffering, and even delaying aid shipments. Demands for political autonomy, already on the rise, received an added jolt as a result. Pakistan’s military government responded with increased repression, provoking a war for secession that cost some 3 million lives but succeeded in making Bangladesh independent in December 1971.¹

That same month, Nicaragua’s capital
Managua was devastated by an earthquake that killed about 10,000 inhabitants and left some 50,000 families homeless. The National Guard joined the widespread looting of businesses in the aftermath. Dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle and his cronies subsequently profited from massive embezzlement of international aid for reconstruction. But this led to crumbling support among the business community and produced growing unrest in the country amid deteriorating economic conditions. The Sandinista National Liberation Front grew rapidly in the following years and by 1979 overthrew the Somoza regime.2

In 1999, a series of powerful earthquakes shook Turkey and Greece, which have been quarrelling over Cyprus and other territorial issues for centuries. The quakes unleashed destructive geological forces, but they also elicited a surprising degree of mutual assistance and an outpouring of goodwill between the two nations, which sent rescue teams, doctors, and emergency supplies to each other in the wake of their respective disasters. This impromptu cooperation facilitated steps to improve overall political relations between them.3

Following the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, there was hope that a similar positive outcome was possible in the civil wars in Aceh, Indonesia, and in Sri Lanka. This chapter describes recent trends in disasters and some of the connections between disasters and peace efforts or ongoing conflicts, and then it turns to the cases of Aceh and Sri Lanka for insights into the opportunities for peacemaking and the obstacles to it after a natural disaster. Both areas suffered numbers of dead and displaced that rivaled or surpassed what many years of violent conflict had wrought. They are also instructive because of the nearly opposite outcomes to date: in Aceh, a peace agreement was struck, yet in Sri Lanka initial euphoria has given way to worries over the possible resumption of hostilities.

Defining Natural and “Un-Natural” Disasters

Virtually no place on earth is immune to the unexpected onset of a flood, storm, or earthquake, although some locations are at much greater risk than others. Natural disasters are most often the product of hydrological, geological, or meteorological events. Sudden shifting in the earth’s crust causes earthquakes and, depending on the location, occasionally tsunami waves. Floods, windstorms, and extreme temperatures are disasters that can, in turn, provoke landslides.

A combination of human-related factors—including ecosystem destruction, climate change, population growth, and the growth of poorly constructed human settlements in vulnerable and inappropriate areas—has set the stage for more frequent and devastating “un-natural” disasters: natural disturbances made worse by human activities. Human populations are straining against the environmental safety net that has, until recently, offered them a measure of protection from the effects of natural disasters. This becomes obvious when examining the sharp trends in the frequency of disasters reported, and the scale to which people are affected by them.

The Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) based in Belgium collaborated with the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance to maintain a database of disasters that have occurred since 1900. Because the reporting methodology was only recently standardized, it is most useful to focus on trends over the past 25 years. (See Figure 7-1.) The number of natural disasters—events where at least 10 deaths occur, at least 100 people are affected, a state of emergency is declared, or requires international assistance—increased fairly steadily in recent years, difficult to say whether this increase is due to weather patterns or human behavior. The average number of disasters per year is “in the double digits,” according to the CRED.

The CRED database of people affected by disasters varied widely from year to year, but the number of people affected per disaster generally increased in recent years. This increase, however, only partly reflects the trend for more frequent disasters. The trend might also reflect increased awareness or better reporting methods. The CRED database can also be used to trace the link between population growth and natural disasters. It reveals an increase in the number of people affected by disasters relative to population growth over time.
declared, or the area requires international assistance—has increased fairly steadily in recent years. But it is difficult to say whether this increase is related to weather patterns, climate change, or the fact that population growth and environmental degradation increase the number of people affected by disasters. Since 2000, an average of 387 natural disasters have been recorded by CRED each year. Reinsurance agency Munich Re also keeps a record of all "natural catastrophes," and reports on historical "great catastrophes." In 2004, Munich Re recorded 641 natural catastrophes. This number is "in line with the average of the past ten years," according to the company.

The CRED database shows that the number of people killed by natural disasters has varied widely since 1980, with no clear increase or decrease. However, the number of people affected by natural disasters—those injured, made homeless, or otherwise requiring immediate assistance—has risen over the same time period. (See Figure 7–2.) This trend is due, in large part, to an overall increase in vulnerable populations as well as to population encroachment in areas at high risk for natural disasters.

A World Health Organization regional environmental advisor noted the effects of population structure and of the increasing frequency of disasters. Dr. Hisashi Ogawa recently observed that the incidence of storms in the Western Pacific Region rose about 2 percent between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, probably as a result of rising global temperatures. During that same time, the number of deaths due to natural disasters increased more than 30 percent. Ogawa surmised that the increasing proportion of older people in the regional population might be a factor behind that increase.

It is becoming more and more clear that intact ecosystems provide unique protection against natural disasters—something that is difficult, if not impossible, to recreate. "We learnt in graphic and horrific detail that the ecosystems, such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses, which we have so casually destroyed, are not a luxury," said U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Klaus Töpfer after the tsunami in December 2004. (See Box 7–1.) "They are lifesavers capable of helping to defend our homes, our loved ones and our livelihoods from some of nature's more aggressive acts."

In the midst of the death and destruction associated with large disasters, researchers are able to study the effects of environmental degradation on protection and resilience.
The year 2004 was the fourth warmest year ever recorded, after 1998, 2002, and 2003, and 9 of the past 10 years are among the 10 warmest years since 1861. Munich Re clearly linked the severity of the 2004 hurricane season—second only to 2005 in economic loss—to climate change trends. In Florida alone, four hurricanes came in rapid succession, accruing local damages of $30 billion. Early estimates suggest that total economic damages from Hurricane Katrina and the associated floods may top $125 billion. Overall, economic losses from natural disasters in 2004 totaled $145 billion, with two thirds of this attributed to windstorms and the other one third to geological events, including the tsunami in South Asia.

In September 2005, a group of meteorologists reported an 80-percent increase, over the past 35 years, in the most powerful types of tropical cyclones—storms fueled by warm ocean water. Though most researchers agree that increases in tropical ocean temperatures have been caused by rising levels of greenhouse gases, the mechanism by which climate change may influence the frequency and severity of hurricanes remains unclear.

What is clear, however, is that the world must expect to face more intense storms in the years to come. Peter Hoppe, Head of Geo Risks Research at Munich Re, observed that several “extreme weather events” during 2004 “are just further evidence that a correlation between global warming and the considerable rise in natural disasters is becoming clear.” For example, the Amazon rainforest in Brazil is losing 1 million hectares each year, which scientists have linked to climate change. In the case of the Amazon, the deforestation is causing a rise in the frequency of droughts, which in turn is leading to a rise in forest fires. This is just one of many examples of how climate change is affecting natural disasters.
The Connection between Disasters and Conflict

The world is plagued by both frequent disasters and violent conflicts. Still, only rarely do the fault lines of conflict intersect with the geography of these disasters. While Thai-
land’s Phuket province was heavily damaged by the December 2004 tsunami, for example, the nearby provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala—where almost 900 people have been killed since early 2004 in violence between separatists and state security forces—escaped unscathed.12

In some places where the destructive forces of conflict and disaster do overlap, devastation eventually gives way to new opportunities for peace and reconciliation. But there may be good reasons why peacemaking overtures do not emerge. Smaller-scale disasters or slow-onset disasters may simply not generate the sudden drama necessary to transform on-the-ground dynamics and capture the world’s attention and sympathies. The suffering inflicted by a disaster may not be shared across a conflict’s divide and hence fail to catalyze the necessary change in attitudes. Or the political leadership in affected countries may simply not possess the courage or wisdom to take advantage of peacemaking opportunities when presented with them.

Some conflicts may be too thorny or intractable to have their fundamental nature altered by post-disaster dynamics. For instance, when the Iranian city of Bam was destroyed by an earthquake in 2003, U.S. medical personnel and supplies were sent, but the gesture of goodwill failed to thaw the icy relations between the two countries. Likewise, an Iranian offer to send 20 million barrels of crude oil to alleviate energy shortages in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (but tied to the demand that U.S. sanctions against Iran be lifted) did not lead to any diplomatic breakthroughs. And ideological hostility banished even the thought of a possible rapprochement when the U.S. State Department turned down a Cuban offer to dispatch more than 1,500 doctors and medical supplies, assembled and ready to go at a moment’s notice, to assist in Katrina-devastated areas along the Gulf Coast.13

Some types of disasters, such as droughts, exhibit characteristics that are less conducive to peacemaking than others, such as earthquakes and floods. As droughts gradually build to a crescendo of famine, disputes over access to scarce land and water may mount among different communities, drawing attention to rifts rather than common interests. In Sudan’s Darfur region, for example, severe droughts caused by desertification in theory might have given a common cause to farming and nomadic communities that have a history of competing over resources but also a record of economic interdependence and a tradition of seeking negotiated solutions. But increasing scarcity led to rising antagonism instead. The situation was worsened by the actions of the central government. In the 1990s and in the early years of the twenty-first century, it stoked the rivalry by playing up ethnic distinctions and by arming nomad militias, in order to divide its opponents and to crush a rebellion that began in 2003.14

There are also cautionary examples where world reaction to a disaster, however well-intentioned, actually worsened rather than improved the outcome. When Somalia was ravaged by drought and famine in the early 1990s, the United States rushed troops to provide emergency food aid. The intervention subsequently evolved into one of the largest U.N. peacekeeping operations. Because Somalia was in the grip of a vicious civil war at the time, policymakers in Washington and New York assumed that Somali warlords had to be brought to heel in order to safeguard aid supplies and stabilize the country. Dispatched in the name of peacemaking, the international forces became combatants in a widening conflict. Confronted with growing anarchy, the peacekeepers were forced to fight. The disaster posed a challenge to more than 16 rebel groups in the country, not to mention the development of national and subnational actors. How can a peacemaking effort succeed in such an environment?

What needs to happen is that a state of crisis needs to be recognized, one in which the needs to help are urgent enough that even those who see global warming as a problem of the distant future and see the suffering as the result of the actions of others, not a necessary evil in the absence of alternatives, may seize the opportunity. The suffering inflicted by an event such as Hurricane Katrina or the monster tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in December 2004 provides a rare opportunity to win the consent of a large number of people. The world will be more likely to seize the opportunity if peacemakers can show that their efforts can work even in the face of adversity. But there needs to be a sense of urgency in order to act before the crisis becomes even worse. The only way to do this is to ensure that the world pays attention to the crisis in the first place. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is serious enough to merit attention. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is urgent enough to merit action. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is important enough to merit investment. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is solvable enough to merit optimism. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is preventable enough to merit prevention. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is manageable enough to merit management. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is curable enough to merit cure. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is irreversible enough to merit action. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unstoppable enough to merit prevention. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unsolvable enough to merit adaptation. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unpreventable enough to merit mitigation. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is uncontrollable enough to merit control. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unavoidable enough to merit acceptance. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unstoppable enough to merit prevention. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unpreventable enough to merit mitigation. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is uncontrollable enough to merit control. The world needs to be convinced that the crisis is unavoidable enough to merit acceptance.

Natural disasters, such as severe droughts and floods, can have long-lasting impacts on the viability of human settlements and the loss of biodiversity. While some communities adapt to these changes, others may suffer long-term consequences. The outcomes of these impacts are often exacerbated by socio-economic inequalities, which can lead to increased vulnerability and displacement. Economic growth and development programs aimed at reducing poverty and improving living standards are critical to preventing further deterioration. However, it is important to consider the long-term effects of these programs on the environment and on local communities. The goal should be to promote sustainable development that respects the rights of all stakeholders and ensures the well-being of future generations.
The disaster-peacemaking connection poses a challenge not just to governments, rebel groups, and civil society in affected countries, but also to diplomats, relief groups, development aid administrators, environmental advocates, and others worldwide. How can we grasp opportunities for peacemaking and translate them into tangible gain? What needs to be done to transform a groundswell of good will in the aftermath of disasters into lasting commitments? What needs to happen to prevent "spoilers"—those who see gain from continued conflict—from derailing the peace process? And how can the sometimes disparate demands of humanitarian action, reconstruction, long-term sustainable development, and conflict resolution be reconciled with each other?

Storm Clouds and Silver Linings

Natural disasters—both rapid-onset events such as storms and floods and slow-onset ones such as droughts—can undermine livelihoods and compromise human security. These impacts can be due to destroyed dwellings; the loss of critical physical infrastructure; severe damage to industries, fisheries, and agriculture; job loss; and health epidemics. While some effects are temporary, in other cases the long-term habitability or economic viability of an affected area is compromised. The outcome is determined not only by the severity of the disaster, but also by the timeliness and adequacy of relief and rebuilding programs and by the degree of resilience in affected communities and societies.

Economic and ecological marginalization worsen the impacts on poor people and ethnic minorities. A disproportionate number of the world's poorest live on the frontline of exposure to disasters: countries with low human development account for 53 percent of recorded deaths from disasters even though they are home to only 11 percent of the people exposed to natural hazards worldwide. In urban areas, poor people contend with precarious housing in slums. In rural areas, inequitable land distribution means that small farmers are often forced onto steep hillsides, where they are much more vulnerable to massive erosion and landslides. Since the coping capacity of poor people tends to be very limited, a disaster may push them over the edge economically.

What needs to be done to transform a groundswell of good will in the aftermath of disasters into lasting commitments?

Aside from livelihood impacts, disasters may trigger a range of societal conflicts. As a recent Oxfam International report explains, disasters "are profoundly discriminatory in their impact on people." And the human response may well reinforce such unequal impacts:

- Disasters often exact a heavy economic toll. In poorer countries, they may obliterate hard-won social gains and sharpen the problems of indebtedness, poverty, and unemployment. Losses of $2 billion from a 2001 earthquake in El Salvador, for instance, were equivalent to a whopping 15 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). (In contrast, the $100 billion of damage due to a 1995 earthquake in Kobe was equal to just 2 percent of Japan's GDP.) Such adverse effects can easily deepen fault lines—between rich and poor, urban and rural communities, men and women, and different ethnic groups.

- Disputes may erupt over proper compensation for land, buildings, and lost or damaged property. Where a disaster wipes out public records—identification cards, birth
and marriage certificates, property titles—people cannot easily prove their identity or property ownership. A disaster may alter the physical landscape so fundamentally that it becomes nearly impossible to identify property lines and other boundaries or to adjudicate property disputes.

- In divided societies, conflict may arise if relief and reconstruction aid are wielded as a tool for dispensing favors to one community or group over another or for tightening the government’s political control. Even the perception of such discrimination can complicate reconciliation efforts. Competitive relief efforts involving opposing forces in a civil war situation may reinforce rather than surmount distrust.

- Conflicts may ensue if resettlement and reconstruction are driven forward without properly consulting affected communities and protecting their rights. Also, disaster-displaced populations may not be welcome elsewhere and could be seen as competitors for scarce land, water, jobs, and social services, particularly in countries that are already confronting social, economic, environmental, or political stress.

Conflicts like these in the aftermath of disasters are not necessarily carried out by violent means. But at least in some cases, they could sow the seeds of future violent conflict by increasing discontent and polarization.

Areas of past and current armed conflict face additional dangers. Warfare depletes a country’s economic resources, rends its social fabric, and damages its natural environment—all affecting the resilience needed to recover from a disaster. Anti-personnel landmines, often scattered indiscriminately by armed protagonists, become even more randomly deadly when they are carried by floodwaters or mudslides to new and hence unknown locations. This has happened in the wake of disasters in Mozambique, Bosnia Herzegovina, and most countries in Central America, for instance.19

Disasters may thus well generate new storm clouds. But by dramatically reshaping the societal landscape, they may also have a silver lining—transforming conflicts in ways that generate fresh opportunities to bring long-running conflicts to an end. A disaster may create suffering that cuts across the divides of conflict and thus prompts common relief needs and interests. The destruction wrought by a disaster may be of such a scale that reconstruction can only proceed by striking at least a cease-fire or by negotiating a peace agreement. Competent and fair disaster relief can improve a government’s image tremendously in the eyes of people who are demanding greater autonomy or independence, easing existing resentments and perhaps paving the way for a more serious dialogue to address grievances.

Whether such peacemaking opportunities are realized depends strongly on the sincerity and commitment of a country’s political leadership. And peacemaking will need to take the interests and motivations of various actors into account in order to succeed. If opposition parties or other important segments of society are left out, they may well see political benefit in opposing peace.

The role of the military is especially critical. Post-disaster relief efforts typically rely heavily on the armed forces, due to their unparalleled numbers and logistical capacities. But this is the same institution that is the very instrument of oppression in countries plagued by civil war. Indeed, a government embroiled in civil war may be tempted to turn tragedy into military advantage, subjecting a rebelious area to renewed central government control. Or the military leadership may pursue interests and agendas in conflict with the wishes of the civilian leadership.

Large-scale natural calamities usually trig-

19 The quest for a viable, united multination aid—structured to sustain those on the ground—has been hampered by a lack of clear political leadership and a failure to adequately assess the needs of the affected populations.
TURNING DISASTERS INTO PEACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

The December 2004 tsunami that devastated Aceh kick-started negotiations to end a conflict that has lasted for almost 30 years and led to widespread violence and displacement. (See Table 7-1.) Before the tsunami, peace negotiations between Acehnese rebels and the Indonesian government had collapsed in May 2003, leading to the imposition of martial law.20

Aceh: Breaking the Logjam

The December 2004 tsunami that devastated Aceh kick-started negotiations to end a conflict that has lasted for almost 30 years and led to widespread violence and displacement. (See Table 7-1.) Before the tsunami, peace negotiations between Acehnese rebels and the Indonesian government had collapsed in May 2003, leading to the imposition of martial law.20

After Aceh—located at the northern tip of Sumatra—was incorporated into the newly established Republic of Indonesia in 1945, a disagreement developed between Jakarta’s insistence on strong central control and Acehnese longings for independence. Promises of special autonomy for the province remained unfulfilled. Rebellion broke out as early as 1953, but the current conflict dates to 1976, when the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) was founded with the express goal of seceding from Indonesia.21

Aceh is rich in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, timber, and minerals, and provides 15–20 percent of Indonesia’s oil and gas output. But this wealth benefited mostly multinational companies and cronies of the long-reigning Suharto dictatorship. Aceh today remains one of Indonesia’s poorest provinces. Unemployment is rampant and about 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, compared with about

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Table 7-1. Impacts of Civil War and the 2004 Tsunami on Aceh’s 4.2 Million People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Number of People or Housing Affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil war</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>131,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced in 1992–2002</td>
<td>1.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced in 2003–04</td>
<td>120,000–150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsunami</td>
<td>37,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced or homeless, initial estimates</td>
<td>500,000–1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced or homeless, remaining^1</td>
<td>more than 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on food aid^2</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged and destroyed houses</td>
<td>116,880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^1 2003 census. ^2 As of August 2005. ^3 World Food Programme food recipients.

SOURCE: See endnote 20.

10 percent in 1996 and 20 percent in 1999. In 2002, 48 percent of the population had no access to clean water, 36 percent of children under the age of five were undernourished, and 38 percent of the Acehnese had no access to health facilities.22

Excessive political centralization and unjust exploitation of Aceh’s natural resources lie at the heart of the conflict. Military repression, massive human rights violations, and a high degree of impunity enjoyed by the security forces have additionally fueled discontent and resentment among the Acehnese. With membership surging in the late 1980s and 1990s, GAM transformed into a genuine popular movement, posing an increasingly serious challenge to Jakarta in an escalating conflict.23

The Indonesian military has long been opposed to resolving the Aceh conflict through negotiations and appears at times to have undermined the fledgling peace efforts undertaken between 2000 and 2003. Economic interests explain this attitude. Since the 1950s, the business dealings of the security forces have grown substantially in all of Indonesia. Profits from legal and illegal ventures have supplemented the official defense budget and enriched military and police commanders.24

Some elements of the military in Aceh are involved in marijuana production and trafficking, prostitution, and extortion from individuals and businesses. Fishers have been forced to sell part of their catch, and coffee growers part of their harvest, at below market rates to the military, who in turn sell these at vastly inflated prices.25

One of the most lucrative sources of income for the military and police is illegal logging. (See Box 7–2.) Conflict has been a convenient cover for those plundering the region’s natural resources, and elements of the security forces have not shied away from orchestrating violence to justify a continued military presence in Aceh.26

The military had been the dominant institution in Indonesia since the mid-1960s—a virtual state within a state. After the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1997, political reformers began the difficult task of loosening the military’s grip on Indonesian society. Reducing its power and making it more accountable is of great importance to the outcome of the Aceh peace process.27

A 2004 law requires the military to end its lucrative business ventures within five years, and Army chief General Endriarto Sutarto pledged to comply by 2007. Efforts have also been made to reduce the military’s direct political influence. The number of parliamentary seats allocated to representatives of the armed forces was reduced from 75 to 38
Aceh's natural treasures are under threat of rapid depletion. The Leuser Ecosystem—at 2.6 million hectares, almost the size of Belgium—is the largest remaining forest on Sumatra, straddling Aceh and North Sumatra provinces. At its heart is the 800,000-hectare Gunung Leuser National Park, part of a World Heritage Site since July 2004. The Leuser Ecosystem is a biodiversity hotspot, with some 700 different animal species and about 4,500 plant species. It is home to some 4 percent of all known bird species worldwide and to a rich range of wildlife, including endangered Sumatran tigers and rhinos, elephants, orangutans, hornbills, and cloud leopards. Leuser also has the world's largest flower (Rafflesia arnoldi) and the tallest one (Amorphophallus titanum).

Aceh is rich in tropical hardwood trees like semaram, merbau, kruing, and meranti, which fetch a high price on international markets and make logging very lucrative. The World Bank and the Indonesian government estimated in the late 1990s that 69 percent of Aceh's total land area remained forested. Since then, however, annual deforestation is believed to have reached 270,000 hectares.

During the long reign of President Suharto, forests were carved up into huge logging and plantation concessions assigned to cronies of the regime. In the post-Suharto era, district governments throughout the country were given the right in January 2001 to license small-scale logging. Issuing such concessions became an easy way for local authorities to raise much-needed revenue, and district heads often tolerate illegal logging. Deforestation continues, despite the central government's efforts to institute a moratorium. By 2002, 26 percent of Gunung Leuser Park had been destroyed, and a major planned road project could increase the portion of affected forest to 40 percent by 2010.

Both the military and the police have been involved in illegal logging in Aceh, working in partnership with private entrepreneurs and levying fees on trucks that carry logs out of Aceh. Loggers pay the security forces for protection against prosecution. Rivalries among different units of security forces have at times apparently led to armed turf battles. The security forces also have a stake in oil palm and other plantations that are being set up on cleared forest areas.

Logging has caused a growing number of flash floods and landslides, sweeping away homes and destroying nearby rice fields. In just the half-year after the tsunami, there were five major floods and landslides; since 2000, a total of 143 such incidents have been documented.

BOX 7-2. ILLEGAL LOGGING IN ACEH

in January 1999 and is slated to go to zero. But in Indonesia's restive provinces, the armed forces still hold considerable sway.  

The humanitarian emergency triggered by the tsunami provided a critical opportunity for change in Aceh—prying open the province, which was under martial law, to international scrutiny, promising an end to the security forces' human rights violations and freedom from prosecution, and offering an avenue for ending the conflict. The military's tight grip over Aceh slipped in the aftermath of the tsunami. For one, its system of control was largely washed away—military and police stations were destroyed or damaged, and many documents relating to martial law, including mandatory identity cards, were lost. Although hardliners were pressing to bar foreign relief personnel from Aceh, the huge scale of the catastrophe made the need for massive international assistance irrefutable.

The tsunami shifted the political dynamic quite decisively, as Richard Baker of the East-West Center explains: "It provided a power-
TURNING DISASTERS INTO PEACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

ful and catalyzing shock; it produced a focus on common goals of relief, recovery and reconstruction; and it brought increased international attention.7 With the eyes of the world trained on Aceh, both the government and the rebels were anxious to seize the high moral ground and not to be seen as sabotaging the peace process.30

President Yudhoyono came to power in 2004 committed to resolving the Aceh conflict. His government saw an opportunity to repair Indonesia's international credibility, sullied by endemic corruption and the military's reputation for brutality. For their part, the rebels had suffered significant military setbacks during martial law and they realized that negotiations were the only way to gain international legitimacy for their struggle. While not making aid directly conditional on conflict resolution, several donors, including Germany and Japan, made it clear to both sides that they expected progress in the peace negotiations so that reconstruction could proceed unimpeded.31

From January to July 2005, five negotiation rounds took place in Helsinki, mediated by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari. Low-level violence between the Indonesian army and GAM continued throughout the talks but did not derail them. Once GAM dropped its demand for Aceh independence in favor of autonomy, an agreement was reached fairly quickly and signed on August 15, 2005. Table 7-2 summarizes its major provisions.32

As of October 2005, both sides were fulfilling their responsibilities under the agreement. Optimism among observers is somewhat tinged by concern that the peace deal could still fall apart, either because of irreconcilable differences or because of the procrastination and anti-peace activities of both sides, including minor guerilla attacks by rebel warlords and criminals.33

Ultimate success in implementing the agreement will depend on the delivery of humanitarian aid, economic development, and social services, and on the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and education facilities. The Jakarta government, in turn, is expected to improve its accountability and commitment to the Aceh peace agreement.34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>A Human Rights Court and a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation will be established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amnesty</td>
<td>GAM members receive amnesty and political prisoners will be released.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reintegration</td>
<td>Former combatants, pardoned prisoners, and affected civilians are to receive farmland,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>jobs, or other compensation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>GAM is to demobilize its 3,000 fighters and relinquish 840 weapons between 15 September</td>
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<td>and 31 December 2005.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Simultaneously, non-local government military forces are to be reduced to 14,700 and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-local police forces to 9,100.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political participation</td>
<td>Free and fair elections are to be held in April 2006 (for Aceh governor) and in 2009</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(for Aceh legislature).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The government is to facilitate the establishment of local political parties (by amending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the national election law) no later than January 2007.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Aceh is entitled to retain 70 percent of its natural resource revenues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GAM representatives will participate in the post-tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>The European Union and ASEAN contributing countries establish an Aceh Monitoring Mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It will monitor human rights, demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration progress and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>will rule on disputes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: See endnote 32.

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State of the World 2006

State of the World 2006
irreconcilable differences in interpreting the agreement's provisions or because of aggrieved opponents determined to waylay the process. There is genuine commitment on both sides, but some elements—military units, rebel warlords, pro-government militias, and criminals pretending to be rebels—would rather see the conflict continue due to ideological reasons or to maintain opportunities for lucrative drug smuggling, illegal logging, and protection rackets.33

Ultimately, the peace deal will need to deliver tangible benefits to members of GAM and anti-GAM militias, many of whom are unskilled and unemployed young men. Aceh's unemployment rate stands at 27 percent. To provide livelihoods that can sustain peace, the economy will have to undergo a transition not only from short-term emergency aid to long-term recovery and from demobilizing combatants to reintegrating them into society, but also from the unsustainable exploitation of resources to a broader mix of economic activities. Aceh's oil reserves are expected to be depleted by 2011, and its forests are rapidly being decimated. Given these pressures, the local economy must be transformed into one less dependent on the province's natural resources and at the same time better able to provide secure livelihoods.34

Sri Lanka:
Neither War nor Peace

Even though Sri Lanka was hit by the same disaster as Aceh, post-disaster developments there were dramatically different. Infighting among the various actors and the presence of powerful "spoilers" stalled the peace process and underlined the fact that local political dynamics are critical in determining the ultimate outcome.

Sri Lanka was tormented by civil war from 1983 until a fragile cease-fire was reached in February 2002. The underlying conflict had its origins in the assertive Sinhala nationalism post-independence vis-à-vis the country's minority Tamils. During British colonial rule, Tamils benefited from superior educational opportunities and they constituted a significant portion of the English-speaking administrative class. Then from 1956 onward, Sinhala-dominated governments pursued language and education policies that discriminated against Tamils. Until the early 1970s, Tamil leaders responded by pressing for equal rights and autonomy in the largely Tamil-speaking regions of the north and east through negotiations and civil disobedience. But the two main Sinhala political parties—the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party—repeatedly reneged on agreements when they were in government. And when either was in the opposition, they stirred up Sinhala passions to thwart any compromise.

The resulting growth in Tamil militancy was greeted by violent repression.35 Still, Sri Lanka's civil war is not the product of simple "ethnic hatreds." Rather, much of the violence has been instigated by the government security forces and other armed groups. As Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo has observed: "A variety of politicians as well as members of the defense industry and paramilitary groups have used the armed conflict to acquire personal and political profit," and thus have a vested interest in prolonging the conflict. But the conflict has drained the country's economy, and it is often growing deprivation rather than ethnic passion that leads young people to join armed groups.36

Much of the violence has actually taken place within the different communities. Sinhala insurrections in the early 1970s and late 1980s were suppressed with great brutality. Among Tamil militant groups, infighting has been
rampant, with the ruthless Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) seeking to eliminate rivals and imposing unquestioned control over Tamil politics. Some Tamil paramilitary groups were bankrolled by the government and fought alongside the Sinhala-dominated army. Sri Lankan Muslims have been caught in the middle; even though many of them are Tamil-speaking, the LTTE has massacred and expelled Muslims in areas under its control.37

After three failed attempts between 1985 and 1995, a government-LTTE cease-fire facilitated by Norway has held since February 2002. Both sides had fought each other to a standstill, suffered desertions, and faced growing public demands for peace. Despite initial enthusiasm, peace negotiations stalled, and the LTTE broke off the talks in April 2003 after it was excluded from an international donors meeting. An October 2003 proposal by the LTTE for a five-year Interim Self Governing Authority in areas under its control divided the Sinhala parties. Some charged that this was little more than a blueprint for a separate Tamil state, and an extended power struggle ensued that led to the dissolution of parliament and new elections in April 2004.38

Another problem inherent in the 2002 cease-fire—one that continues to cloud the prospects for peace—is that it narrowly focused on a deal between the two main actors, the governing party and the LTTE. It effectively ignored or sidelined several constituencies—the Sinhala-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party (JVP, or People’s Liberation Front), the Muslim parties, and the Buddhist clergy—whose consent, if not active collaboration, is essential.39

The infighting and wrangling intensified so much that a resumption of war had become a dreaded expectation by the time the tsunami struck. It took nature’s fury to give the foes a shared challenge and to revive interest in peacemaking. (See Table 7–3.)

| Table 7–3. Impacts of Civil War and the 2004 Tsunami on Sri Lanka’s 19.6 Million People |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| **Impacts**                      | **People or Housing Affected** |
| Civil war                       |                               |
| Killed                          | 65,000                        |
| Displaced, at peak              | 1 million                     |
| Displaced, as of August 2005    | 347,500 (plus 143,000 refugees in India) |
| Tsunami                         |                               |
| Killed                          | 33,900                        |
| Missing                         | 5,000                         |
| Displaced or homeless, initial estimates | 800,000–1 million |
| Displaced or homeless, remaining | 457,500                      |
| Dependent on food aid           | 915,000                       |
| Damaged and destroyed houses    | 90,000                        |

1 2004 population. 2 World Food Programme food recipients. Source: See endnote 40.
tsunami political developments could either unite the war-torn island or reignite the civil war. Government and rebels increasingly regarded aid distribution, repair work, and other emergency assistance in a competitive context. The Tamil Tigers accused the Colombo government of discrimination in aid distribution against Tamil areas, a charge not corroborated by most independent observers. At the same time, there were reports that the LTTE was hijacking shipments to distribute aid through its own network. The LTTE-affiliated Tamil Rehabilitation Organization aggressively took control of many relief camps along the eastern coast. UNICEF and Human Rights Watch verified reports that the LTTE was recruiting children living in refugee camps, resuming its reprehensible practice of relying on child soldiers.42

International donors increased their pressure on both sides to agree upon a “joint mechanism” for the equitable distribution of $3 billion in international relief and reconstruction aid pledges. One reason was that they wanted to avoid channeling funds directly to the Tigers—officially listed as a terrorist group in many countries and thus ineligible for aid. An agreement was critical because little to no reconstruction was possible in LTTE-controlled areas without the Tigers’ consent. And a deal was also regarded as a confidence-building tool that could revitalize the deadlocked peace process.43

After months of wrangling, the government and LTTE finally agreed on a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure in June 2005. Under the pact, a panel of government officials, rebels, and representatives of Muslim communities would recommend, set priorities among, and monitor aid projects in six affected regions in the north and east.44

For the LTTE, a formal role in the distribution of international reconstruction funds would yield significant political benefits—solidifying its control over the northeastern part of the country and conferring newfound legitimacy. Yet this prospect is utterly unacceptable to the JVP, the third-largest party in parliament. Vehemently opposed to any measures that would legitimize the LTTE or help it carve out a separate state, the party withdrew from the government coalition in protest.45

In response to a complaint brought by the JVP, arguing that the aid-sharing deal is unconstitutional, Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court temporarily suspended it in July 2005. Although the court ruled that the deal is in principle legitimate, it objected to specific clauses regarding the management of donor funds in rebel-held areas. The aid deal is now held hostage to political maneuvering. A Court hearing to help decide the fate of the agreement was expected in late November 2005, after presidential elections that may well reshuffle the political deck and bring further complications for the faltering peace efforts.46

Yet aid is needed swiftly: by July 2005, only $459 million in tsunami recovery out of a promised $3 billion had actually been delivered, and many survivors are still living in dismal conditions, with frustration rising. If humanitarian assistance remains sluggish and uneven in different communities, it further complicates the task of reconciliation.47

Additional storm clouds are gathering. In the eastern part of the country, a shadow war has been going on ever since a renegade faction of the Tamil Tiger rebels broke away in March 2004. The LTTE accuses the government of using the breakaway group as a proxy force. Meanwhile, political killings among rival Tamil factions, most committed by the LTTE, have been rising sharply. Worries that full-scale conflict might resume surged in August 2005, when Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirkamar was
assassinated, a murder the government blamed on the LTTE.48

Still, neither side is ready for renewed war. Both were weakened by the tsunami. The International Monetary Fund warned that a failure to revive the peace process would risk compounding serious economic problems, including high inflation, large fiscal deficits, and growing public debt. By September, the Sri Lankan government called for a “redesign” of the country’s stalled peace process, indicating it wanted greater involvement from the international community.49

Humanitarian and Environmental Peacemaking

As the recent experiences in Aceh province and Sri Lanka indicate, humanitarian action in the aftermath of natural disasters can be a powerful catalyst for transforming conflict dynamics, sometimes providing the impetus needed to overcome deep human divides and jump-starting peace efforts. The devastation caused by earthquakes, floods, or other natural calamities can have a strong psychological and emotional impact even on those hardened by many years of armed conflict.

But a rush of post-disaster goodwill alone is unlikely to carry warring factions through the complexities and stumbling blocks of a peace process. To maintain momentum, humanitarianism needs to be transformed into political change—addressing the root causes of the conflict at hand, putting in place confidence-building measures, and taking on the vested interests of those who benefit from a continuation of conflict. Policymakers and humanitarian groups must be proactive in dealing with the remnants of conflict, designing a rebuilding process that addresses the social and economic needs of ex-fighters and disaster victims alike and calling for sustainable and equitable development that reduces the likelihood of recurring conflict as much as the vulnerability to future disasters. (See Table 7-4.)

In disaster-affected areas, especially where political tensions run high, better coordination is desperately needed among humanitarian action, reconstruction, disaster prevention, environmental protection, economic development, and post-conflict disarmament efforts. Too often, agencies and organizations with similar goals operate in parallel spheres, with little communication or collaboration. They often have different agendas, constituencies, operational cultures, and time horizons. And they may well compete for influence and visibility. A 2004 report by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) laments that “the divisions between those working on natural disaster risk reduction and complex political emergencies and development have hindered the search for ways to address such situations.”50

Greater coherence, with a focus on integrating different perspectives and drawing on unique strengths, should be the goal of working with the multitude of actors present after a natural disaster strikes. People from these different fields of expertise need to be brought together to reconcile the needs and agendas of different stakeholders and to bridge short-term and long-term concerns. Such collaboration should begin before a natural disaster actually strikes. By building coalitions and participating in integrated planning sessions, relief agencies, U.N. offices, civil society groups, and international donors can strengthen their collective impact. Aid and reconstruction efforts, while grim in their origin, provide real opportunities for pragmatic planning and innovative rebuilding. Environmental restoration is an important aspect of any such project. Natural disasters often wreak havoc on ecosystems, especially those left vulnerable from previous degrada-
Table 7-4. Key Tasks for Post-disaster Reconstruction and Peacemaking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict termination</td>
<td>Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peace monitoring and peacekeeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security sector reform (subjecting military institutions to democratic oversight, impartial policing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human rights training, enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues</td>
<td>Poverty reduction (and thus reduction of disaster vulnerability and of social inequities that may fuel future conflict)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil society involvement in reconstruction and disaster mitigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthening the rights of minorities and indigenous communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental issues</td>
<td>Protection and restoration of ecosystems that offer shelter against storms, floods, landslides, droughts, and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensuring that reconstruction of housing and infrastructure does not accelerate environmental degradation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adoption of more sustainable practices in agriculture, forestry, and industry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Environmental restoration is not only a core ingredient of disaster prevention and mitigation strategies, it can also be an unparalleled opportunity to promote cooperation among actors who otherwise might see each other as adversaries. The 2004 UNDP report mentions that “in Colombia, violently opposed local communities in the Department of Meta have worked together to mitigate the impact of floods as a means not only of protecting livelihoods, but also of building trust and reconciliation.” But it concludes that on a global scale, “little or no attention has been paid to the potential of disaster management as a tool for conflict prevention initiatives.”

The time is right, however, for such initiatives to multiply. As much as disasters may have...
a silver lining for humanitarian peacemaking, it is without question far preferable to base cooperation on environmental protection and disaster prevention. A growing array of “environmental peacemaking” initiatives have been launched around the world—including peace parks, shared river basin management plans, regional seas agreements, and joint environmental monitoring programs—built on the notion that shared concerns and vulnerabilities can facilitate cooperative behavior among otherwise adversarial communities or countries. Similar notions are applicable to disaster management.

Natural disasters often provide unique situations in which political and aid-related decisions can either hasten peacebuilding efforts or deepen existing divides within and between countries. Governments, multilateral agencies, and civil society organizations, all with access to capital and international attention, yield great influence in post-disaster reconstruction efforts. International cooperation around natural disaster prevention and mitigation can be effective in reducing risk, while also bridging long-standing political tension between countries.

Natural disasters often provide unique situations in which political and aid-related decisions can either hasten peacebuilding efforts or deepen existing divides within and between countries.

In a series of U.N.-backed initiatives, countries in the Arab, South Asian, and Eastern Mediterranean regions have collaborated to reduce earthquake losses. Following a strong earthquake in Algeria in 1980, which killed 3,000 people and displaced nearly a half-million others, the Arab Fund for Economic Development and the Islamic Bank worked with UNESCO to create the Programme for the Assessment and Mitigation of Earthquake Risk in the Arab Region. The program has provided training to evaluate earthquake risk, helped integrate earthquake provisions into building codes, and installed 300 seismometers and accelerometers in Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt—countries that often suffer from political tensions.

UNESCO, through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, has also been active in establishing an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System. When the December 2004 tsunami hit, no unified warning system existed in the region, and this proved to be a major factor in the catastrophic loss of life. The proposed warning system is slated to be part of a global network, strengthening and unifying national warning systems. More broadly, the United Nations is coordinating implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action, a 10-year natural disaster risk reduction plan adopted by 168 country delegations at the U.N. Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005.

Both war-affected and disaster-ravaged populations need comprehensive assistance, and it makes sense to blend their needs into a comprehensive program. Broad, community-based reconstruction efforts will benefit war-displaced individuals and ex-combatants as well as the general population if they provide housing, infrastructure, vocational skills, and jobs in a timely and non-discriminatory manner. (The provision of arable land—a much scarcer commodity, particularly in the aftermath of disasters—tends to be far more problematic and can trigger fresh conflicts.) Measures to deal with post-conflict issues are of importance to the population at large as well: weapons collection reduces the level of lawlessness, and efforts to locate and collect anti-personnel landmines mean that once-populated and
fertile areas become accessible again.57

These tasks require adequate funding. Large-scale aid flows—some $9 billion has been pledged by governments and multilateral agencies, and another $5 billion by private sources for tsunami-affected countries, for instance—can serve as an economic incentive for peace. Yet that very inflow also presents a tempting target for embezzlement. Indonesia has long been one of the most corrupt countries (30 percent or more of aid funds are typically pilfered before reaching the intended recipients), while Aceh’s is among the most corrupt provincial authorities within Indonesia. And as developments in Sri Lanka have shown, aid flows can trigger political infighting that slows or paralyzes the actual delivery of assistance to victims and may even endanger peacemaking.58

High standards of transparency and accountability cannot be achieved without strengthening civil society. Community-based groups play a pivotal role in ensuring that post-disaster and post-conflict programs are well implemented and are broadly beneficial—with regard to social equity as well as natural resource management. Donor governments and U.N. agencies must consider what they can do to discourage top-down approaches and to broaden the maneuvering space of civil society groups.

Since the end of the cold war, multilateral agencies, governments, and NGOs have struggled to design appropriate and workable responses to the challenges of “complex humanitarian emergencies”—situations requiring political, humanitarian, and military action. Many lessons have been learned (though not necessarily always applied later) with regard to peacekeeping, disarmament, human rights, anti-corruption, sustainable development, and other related issues. But recent disasters, especially the Indian Ocean tsunami, have exposed the need for more creative and imaginative collaboration between the multitude of agencies and organizations responding to disasters.

By learning from past situations in which natural disasters exposed regional or community-based violence and inequities, by anticipating an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, and by recognizing the synergies between humanitarian efforts and environmental peacemaking, governments and relief agencies have the invaluable opportunity—and indeed the responsibility—to increase the sustained effectiveness of their post-disaster assistance.