

**Foreword by the United Nations Secretary-General's  
Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery**

In the immediate weeks following the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004, many of us pledged that this operation would set new standards of accountability and transparency. We also pledged that out of the rubble of the Indian Ocean's coastlines, and the suffering of its inhabitants, we would 'build back better': placing coastal communities on a better development path; leaving survivors safer from future disasters; using the lessons learned today to ensure better responses in the future. A disaster of this scale and a response of such sweeping breadth and generosity deserve nothing less.

Therefore, I was greatly encouraged to see, in the early months of 2005, over 40 key aid agencies - including the United Nations, donor governments and non-government organisations - join hands to form the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), an historic, collaborative process to evaluate key elements of the relief and recovery effort. The TEC represents an extraordinary effort at reflection, self-criticism and transparency. The studies it has sponsored, and this Synthesis Report, provide an invaluable, independent account of how the tsunami response has proceeded so far.

As reflected in the pages that follow, our efforts to respond to the tsunami have placed in sharp relief both strengths and weaknesses in the way we organize ourselves when faced with such massive challenges. Indeed, the report includes both praise and uncomfortable reading, but the honesty of the analysis does us all a great service.

This report and the companion thematic studies identify important lessons and an agenda for reform that deserve careful analysis and an appropriate response. They help us to see how we can and must do better in responding to ongoing and future disaster relief and recovery challenges.

To my mind, the overriding messages of this report are three-fold:

First, we must do better at utilizing and working alongside local structures. With nothing but good intentions, the

international community descends into crisis situations in enormous numbers and its activities too often leave the very communities we are there to help on the sidelines. Local structures are already in place and more often than not the 'first responders' to a crisis. The way the international community goes about providing relief and recovery assistance must actively strengthen, not undermine, these local actors.

Second, we must find the will and the resources to invest much more in risk reduction and preparedness measures. Local structures and local measures - whether part of national or provincial government efforts or embedded in the communities - need to be strengthened to reduce vulnerabilities to tomorrow's disasters. And international and local actors need to forge solid partnerships between and among themselves, well in advance of their being tested in crisis.

Third, we must translate good intentions into meaningful reform. The report identifies critical systemic challenges for the humanitarian community, many of which were analyzed at length in the aftermath of the Rwanda crisis and have already been included in a range of standards and codes of conduct. But the fact that we continue to struggle to turn these principles into practice, as this report highlights, demands that we set about on our shared agenda for reform with the courage and commitment necessary to see the process through to full implementation.

The final story of the tsunami recovery process has yet to be written. This is a multi-year effort, which makes it even more important that we pay close heed to the analysis and recommendations in this report. I ask you to commit to helping us multiply our successes, realign our efforts where necessary, and retain the spirit of openness and self-criticism that this report so ably embodies.

William Jefferson Clinton