

# An African perspective on the tsunami

by Bahame Tom Nyanduga

*The tsunami reminded us that the world is a global village with common vulnerabilities but also that the needs of Africa often take second place.*

While the international community's attention was focused on the damage caused to the countries in South Asia, little attention was paid to the tsunami effect on the western side of the Indian Ocean, about six thousand kilometres from the epicentre. Tanzania reported 10 people dead and 2 in Kenya but it was Somalia, lacking a central government and reeling from the effects of 14 years of war and drought [see article by OCHA Somalia page 51] which suffered the most - 290 fatalities and about 54,000 displaced. Six hundred fishing boats, which provided income for 75% of the coastal population, were destroyed. The lives of people in communities along a 650-km stretch between Hafun and Garacad in the north east to as far south as the lower Juba area, south of Mogadishu, were affected. Damage was greatest in Puntland, a self-declared autonomous region. Infrastructure in the town of Hafun was almost totally destroyed. The fact that Somalia does not have a government to advocate for assistance makes it dependent

on the UN to do so. UNICEF and the World Food Program have achieved a lot with limited resources but donors have been unresponsive to the country's needs. At the beginning of April only 3% of the funding requested in the UN's 2005 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia had been pledged.

Two people died in the Indian Ocean state of the Seychelles and some 900 families lost their homes. The waves caused severe flooding and considerable damage to transport infrastructure including ports, road network, bridges, public utilities, houses, and private property on Mahe and Praslin islands. The government has estimated the cost of repairing damage at \$30m. However, the international community has been slow to respond. At the beginning of May the Seychelles had received only \$4.4 of the \$11.5 million budgeted for under the UN's Indian Ocean Flash Appeal and commencement of planned rehabilitation projects has had to be delayed.

Kenya and Tanzania were the last two countries to be hit by the

tsunami. Tourists were evacuated from beaches in tourist resorts but the news did not reach those who died. Mechanisms did not exist to enable authorities to pass on information from other countries about the devastating potential of the killer waves. The tsunami has demonstrated the need for civil defence preparedness and disaster mitigation programmes in Africa. In recognition of this the Chinese Red Cross Society and the Chinese government have made donations to the Tanzania Red Cross Society to build disaster response capacity.

The international community can do more to assist the people, communities and states badly affected by the tsunami in Africa. All responses to this and future natural disasters in Africa must be shaped by recognition of the relevance of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

***Bahame Tom Nyanduga is a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. Email: btomn@yahoo.com***