



## The world is in mourning

▶▶ **On 26 December 2004**, the world's biggest earthquake for over forty years occurred between the Australian and Eurasian plates in the Indian Ocean. The Earth tremor triggered a powerful tsunami that spread thousands of kilometres over several hours.

Fifteen minutes after the quake took place, the giant waves had hit the Northern tip of the island of Sumatra. In 30 minutes they had reached the Andaman Islands, while it took them 90 minutes to reach the Western coast of Thailand. In two hours the tsunami had hit Sri Lanka, while it was not more than one and a half hours later that the waves had swept the Maldives. A further three and a half hours later the tsunami had reached Somalia. Over ten countries in two continents were badly hit.

The devastation and grief left behind by the giant waves is of shocking proportions: at the time of going to press the official toll stands at over 145,000, but the definitive figure, which is believed to be far higher, might never be known. Entire communities have been left hungry and homeless having lost all their possessions as well as their source of income – in most cases represented by either fishing boats or arable land. Besides, the lives of thousands of people are now at risk because of lack food and drinking water, as well as a compromised sanitation system.

But the ramifications of this catastrophe have gone far beyond the areas directly affected by the tsunami. As the entire world watched in shock the news bulletins relaying pictures of the disaster, a number of far away countries soon realised they were directly involved in the tragedy, as thousands of tourists from Europe and North America, who were enjoying their Christmas break in the sun, also perished in the disaster. With nearly 3,000 of its citizens either missing

or reported to be dead, Sweden, for example, is believed to be the fourth or fifth hardest hit country in the world in terms of loss of lives. This is a tragedy that has deeply shaken the world's conscience, as the increasing stream of aid reaching the zones affected by the tsunami clearly demonstrates.

World leaders have now pledged to set up an early warning system for the Indian Ocean. While it is not clear yet what form this will take - setting up a system to spread information efficiently across such a vast area is far from being an easy task - there is little doubt that the satellite sector could play a fundamental role in its development. Satellites, in fact, are quite simply irreplaceable as tools for gathering meteorological information from sensors on the ground and in the water, as well as broadcasting a warning signal over huge territories.

Meanwhile the Asian satellite community is beginning to move in support of the population affected. In this sense Dr Eui Koh, President of the APSCC, has launched an appeal: "I would like to propose that APSCC members volunteer to help plan/build satellite networks in those countries [affected by the tsunami]. Basic infrastructure, road and telecommunications services have been destroyed, all of which are essential to co-ordinate the relief effort.

"Also, the reconstruction of communities is a long-term effort rather than a short-term one. Therefore I implore APSCC members who can volunteer their time to help plan and implement satellite network services in stricken areas to please do so. If anyone can volunteer, please contact Inho Seo, Director, Project Development and Co-ordination, APSCC at: inho\_seo@apscc.or.kr, or tel: +82 2 508 4883-5 at the APSCC Secretariat." ■

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