

# EDITORIAL

*Following the Asian earthquake and tsunami, emergency humanitarian assistance is the top priority. While the focus is to save lives and fight diseases, the United Nations Environment Programme has stressed that it is also important to address underlying risks, such as solid and liquid waste, industrial chemicals, sewage treatment and the salinization of drinking water.*

*UNEP is creating a Task Force to coordinate all inputs from its system to identify and alleviate the environmental impacts and to support the efforts of all affected areas.*

*Several governments have stressed the importance of developing effective early-warning systems, which will be high on the agenda of the international meeting on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States in January (see also page 15). We shall report on the conference in the next issue.*

*IUCN experts have said that the extent of the flooding had been exacerbated by the destruction of the mangrove forests along the coastlines in some areas, for the purposes of crabbing and fish farming.*

*Much has been discussed regarding the cost of rebuilding the affected areas. The big insurance companies have said that their costs will not be as high as thought. This is because mostly the poor were affected, who had no insurance, rarely have legal tenure, and live and work in shanty shops, stalls and homes.*

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*The report on page 2 notes that there is concern that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be met in Africa by 2015. Indeed, some experts have said that it will take until 2165 – 150 years too late! Strangely, no one has as yet contradicted this. UN officials are still optimistic but the Secretary-General is worried that a large amount of the money for rebuilding the flooded areas will be taken from that earmarked for Africa. The UK and Germany, among others, have promised that this will not be the case.*

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*We are glad that the Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed el-Baradei, will be the only candidate for election as IAEA Head for the next period of office. Groups in the US Congress had tried to prevent this and have also been lobbying against Kofi Annan over the Iraq oil-for-food scandal. As the Financial Times pointed out in a recent editorial, this was an attempt by the “right-wing commentariat” not so much to hit the Secretary-General, but rather to “destroy” the UN as an institution, which would be “a disaster, for all of us, including, especially, the US.”*

*- Wolfgang B. S. -*

12 January 2005