

Speech by
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President of the Republic of Indonesia

At the

One-year Commemoration of the Tsunami
Banda Aceh, Indonesia, 26 December 2005

*Bismillah Hirrahmanirrahim
President Xanana Gusmao,
Ministers,
Special Envoys,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Saudara-saudaraku di seluruh Indonesia,*

First of all, let us all thank these beautiful Acehnese children for singing that lovely song. They warmed our hearts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and I speak on behalf of Indonesia in welcoming all of you to Banda Aceh, Indonesia. I am here to join you to honor the dead, the living, and to offer gratitude.

This is a very special gathering of people of all nationalities, race, religion, and cultures, united by tragedy and our common humanity. In this wide open space on the calm shores of Ulee Leuh, under the blue sky, we stand together as God's children.

It was under the same blue sky, exactly a year, ago that mother earth unleashed her most destructive power upon us.

That assault began with a massive earthquake about 250 km off Sumatra. But that earthquake was only a prelude of a horrific catastrophe to come. 15 minutes later, three giant killer tsunami waves, 9 meters in height and moving at around 250 km per hour,

crashed on the shores of many communities around the Indian Ocean, destroying everything and drowning nearly everyone in their path.

Indonesia suffered the worst loss, here in Aceh and Nias, with over 200,000 dead and missing.

In Sri Lanka, 31,000 people died, and 4,000 are missing. India's Southeast coast counted over 8,000 dead, and the Andaman and Nicobar islands lost over 2,000 people.

Thailand's death toll topped 5,300 people, many of them tourists. Another 2,800 people are missing.

Other nations lost their loved ones: Malaysia, the Maldives, Somalia, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Seychelles.

In a matter of minutes, over 280,000 people perished. And more than a million people all around the Indian Ocean became homeless.

We stand here together today in remembrance of that suffering, paying respect, once again, to the good men and women, and all the children, lost to the sea. We bow our heads in deep prayers, so that the souls of our loved ones, found or unfound, buried on land or at sea, have a proper resting place at God's side.

But today, tomorrow, and the day after, will not be about suffering, because we are here to also honor those who survived. These sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, parents—they all want to rebuild their lives.

You will see these tsunami survivors everywhere, here in Aceh, in Nias, in Phuket, in Phang Na, in Jaffna, in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and in many other stricken areas. They greet you with smiles, with enthusiasm, with hope. But their cheerful smiles masks a steely resolve. We owe them the same.

There is Martunis, the seven-year old Acehnese boy who was lost at sea for twenty-one days, hanging onto a tree branch. He lived on bottled water that floated by, and on his determination to survive.

There is Malawati, who lost her husband to the tsunami and was lost at sea for five days. She could not swim, so she hung onto a tree trunk all that time, floating in shark-infested waters. She too miraculously survived by sheer will, and by love for her unborn baby, who also survived by the grace of *Allah Almighty*.

And, of course, there is inner strength in the children who just performed for us, all made orphans by the tsunami, all trying to be children again.

We honor ALL the tsunami survivors for their strength and courage. You remind us that life is beautiful and worth struggling for. We must honor that struggle. The rest of your future should be days of hope.

We will need plenty of that hope given what the tsunami did to our communities. Here in Aceh and Nias, roads, bridges, and buildings disappeared, and local government ceased to function. There was no electricity, no phone lines, no cars, no gasoline. Our logistical problems seemed insurmountable at times—at one point, there was only one helicopter left in all of Aceh. We suffered total paralysis. Just cleaning up the debris took months.

Yet we moved forward with each day.

In a catastrophe of this size, it is easy to see only ruins. But look past the rubble and you will see progress.

By the roads that are being built, including one that will reach Meulaboh, you will see villages slowly taking shape. You will see markets brightening up landscapes. You will see children back at school and new teachers being trained. You will see miles of new roads, miles of new sewage pipes.

Ports and boats are being rebuilt, as are hospitals and clinics. Farmers are going back to their fields and gardens. Tens of thousands are being given training to go back to work.

And despite everyone's fears, we escaped epidemics. That was not by a stroke of luck. That was due to sheer hard work.

And with the establishment of a Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, the rebuilding of Aceh and Nias is being carried out with dignity, transparency and strong community involvement. Please join me in commending Dr. Kuntoro Mangkusubroto and all the staff of the BRR for all their dedication and perspiration in the rebuilding of Aceh and Nias.

Our reconstruction efforts are far from over. We have to provide new homes for the hundreds of thousands of homeless. We are moving as fast as we can, building more than five-thousand houses every month.

There is still much more to be done: we need to stimulate the economy and provide jobs. We need to get entrepreneurs back on

their feet. We need to meet the needs of not just the cities, but the outlying villages too.

Yet, mark my words: we have the energy, the commitment, and the will to make all this happen. We greet 2006 with confidence and resolve. We will rebuild Aceh and Nias, and we will rebuild it back better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that one of the most significant impacts of the tsunami was how it brought global citizens together. Never before did a natural disaster bring out so much compassion, goodwill and generosity.

In Indonesia, the whole nation wept, and everyone, rich or poor, sent food and funds to their brothers and sisters in Aceh and Nias, and thousands volunteered for relief work.

But it made a huge difference that the world came to our aid.

Forty-four countries sent military personnel and assistance, forming the largest military operation for humanitarian relief since World War II. NGOs and donors made record financial contributions—in all, we have \$ 9 billion dollars pledged to the reconstruction effort. Citizens from Dili to Ankara, London to Mexico City, Los Angeles to Melbourne, Beijing to Tehran, and many more places, all got into the act of caring and contributing, prompting a phenomenal trend in world affairs.

Their compassion cut across religious, racial, and cultural lines, uniting them in global solidarity.

This morning, we have in our midst representatives of many nations who are part of this global solidarity. Through you, we express our gratitude to all our friends around the world for your support. We know your support was genuine and came from the heart, and for that we are eternally grateful.

My appeal to you is to keep this flame of goodwill alive. Do not let it fizzle. The friendships, the confidence building, the networks, the know-how—all these things that you shared together during the emergency relief is a valuable asset that we must nurture. The compassion many of you have shown is testament to what humanity can achieve.

The tsunami has produced the seeds of unprecedented global solidarity : this time, it helped tsunami victims, but I believe we can continue to nurture this rare global compassion and goodwill to

address other global concerns, and bring greater peace and prosperity for humanity. What a great legacy that would be, don't you agree ?

After all, here in Aceh, we already have an example of how a new hope for peace can emerge out of the ruins of destruction.

On August 15th of this year, the Indonesian government signed a historic peace deal with the leaders of the Free Aceh Movement. That peace deal ended 3 decades of bloody conflict in Aceh. It gave the Acehnese a golden chance to start a new life of dignity and reconciliation under a special autonomy, within a united Indonesia.

Let it be known from hereon that the future of Aceh is not a future of blood and tears, but a future of sweat and

Ladies and gentlemen,

You know, not far from here, we plan to erect a monument to the tsunami, which will be built around a grounded ship at Punge, about 4 km from here.

But if you look closely, there are tsunami monuments all around you. I call them "living monuments", and these living monuments are stronger than steel or concrete walls.

Your presence today is one of these monuments—a monument to solidarity.

The children playing at the beach again, laughing and smiling—they are another living monument—a monument to hope and resilience.

The fishermen going back to sea again—they are monuments to perseverance.

There are living monuments to courage amongst the families who are being reunited, and amongst the homeless moving into new homes.

There are living monuments to vibrant spirituality in the mosques throughout Aceh and the churches in Nias.

And there is a living monument to peace in the silence of guns throughout Aceh.

So, as they say in Indonesia, "out of darkness, comes brightness".

The tsunami cast a fatal blow on our shores. But it is no match for a greater force that we call the human spirit. That spirit to live, to survive, and to love, continues.

That spirit will live amongst us today, tomorrow, and the days after.

Insyah Allah, Insyiah Allah !!

I thank you.