



**Tsunami and Archives: The Unexpected Possibilities
Jakarta, Indonesia – 17-18 July 2006**

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The International Gathering on Tsunami and Archives, sponsored by the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) and the International Council on Archives (ICA), was held in Jakarta, Indonesia 17-18 July 2006. The event was conducted in English and Indonesian and provided a venue for archivists from at least 25 countries to share with professional peers their experiences resulting from the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, and other significant recent disasters, including the fire in Weimar's historic Duchess Anna Alima Library, and Hurricane Katrina in the U.S.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami (from the Japanese “tsu” meaning “port” or “harbor” and “nami” meaning “wave”) was one of the most devastating natural disasters in recorded history. Its consequences were staggering: worldwide, as many as 296,962 people were killed, 500,000 more were injured, and 2,000,000 men, women, and children were left bereft of homes, schools, and churches.¹ The impact on Indonesia was particularly catastrophic, with Banda Aceh on the northernmost tip of the island of Sumatra, and nearby Nias Island to the west being only 200 km from the earthquake's epicenter 30 km below the ocean's surface. The huge earthquake which triggered the tsunami was the third largest earthquake ever to be measured. It registered 9.1 on the Richter scale.

In a recorded account, one witness described just prior to the catastrophe “an extremely loud buzzing noise like that of a low flying warplane,” a familiar sound in Nanggroe Aceh Darussaleem because of the ongoing war between the Free Aceh separatists and the Government of Indonesia. Soon after this, a 16-year old student described waves “twice the height of a coconut tree,” roaring ashore, estimated by a reporter to be “moving 200 to 250 km per hour.”²

The event that followed occurred so quickly few had time to react. Twenty minutes after the earthquake in Indonesia (80 minutes in Thailand; 90 minutes in Sri Lanka and India³), the waves that had moments before receded 2-3 km (1-2 miles) to expose sea bed, rocks, and coral now returned with a fury, pulverizing the shoreline and everyone and everything in their path.

“Within seconds everybody was whacked down by the water and swept away relentlessly and helplessly by the angry sea. People were rolled over, dragged to the bottom and seconds later thrown up to the surface only to be dragged

down again, toppled over smashed and tossed up again. They were swept along for miles together with broken walls of buildings and houses, motorcars, torn electric poles and tree trunks, and all sorts of debris. It was indeed an indescribably spiritually and physically painful torture of much violence, blood and broken limbs . . .”⁴

The severity and extent of the loss is almost incomprehensible. In Aceh and Nias, approximately 133,000 people died; another 38,000 were recorded as missing. The event also ravaged the coastlines of Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Somalia, Seychelles, Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Mauritius, South Africa, and Australia. In addition to the loss of life and property, archival holdings in many coastal regions facing the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean were damaged.

While the grimness of this loss pales in comparison to the massive loss of life, the International Gathering on Tsunami and Archives reasserted the necessity for records to be accessible before a region can repair itself. For example, restoring the Land Property Archives of Aceh is necessary to reestablish property rights and boundaries in a region where not only whole buildings and homes were washed away, but the physical landscape was reshaped.

The tone of the conference was sensitive to the massive loss and suffering participants experienced personally or secondhand through their relief efforts assisting victims. Ms. Nolda C. Romer-Kenepa (President, CARBICA – the Caribbean arm of the International Council on Archives [ICA], and representing National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles in Curacao), chaired the first session and introduced Mr. Joan van Albada (Secretary General, ICA) who expressed his deepest sympathies to the attendees on behalf of ICA. Mr. van Albada conveyed his intense respect for all who had rallied to the victims during their hour of need. Mr. Djoko Utomo (Director General, National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia [ANRI], our gracious host and the conference organizer), spoke on the importance of archives and the need for international cooperation to save our shared and irreplaceable cultural heritage.

Mr. Kenichi Kato (Japanese International Cooperation Agency – JICA) described Japan’s immediate and ongoing contributions to Indonesia. These include: emergency medical assistance; infrastructure repairs to sewage systems, airports, and roads; reconstruction planning; and educational support both to rebuild schools and train teachers and local leaders to better formulate, implement and evaluate educational plans. JICA also provided post traumatic stress counseling, new fishing

boats and nets to reestablish local livelihoods, and job training in traditional occupations including brick manufacturing, welding, embroidery, and Patchouli oil production.⁵ Most significantly, from the perspective of the conference, JICA loaned ANRI a large freezer, a freeze drying chamber, and the expertise of Isamu Sakamoto, a paper conservator who has helped staff at the National Archives in Jakarta restore the Land Property Archives from Aceh.

The second session, chaired by Mr. Haji Jibah Matassim (President of SARBICA, the Southeast Asian section of ICA, attending from the Brunei Museum in Brunei Darussalam) included post tsunami reports on the condition of the archives in coastal Thailand and Sri Lanka. Mrs. Sureerat Wongsangiem (Director, National Archives of Thailand) reported more than 3,000 people had died in six provinces facing the Andaman Sea, and that property damage has been estimated at nearly 16 million baht (U.S. \$425,025).

Dr. Saroja Wettasangihe (Director, Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka) explained that approximately 70% of the coastline of her island country was affected by the tsunami, with significant damage occurring to governmental records (birth, marriage, and death registers, land records, pension records, etc.), private institutional records, records belonging to the general public, and the rare books and manuscripts housed in religious institutions. By the first week of January, 2005, the National Archives of Sri Lanka televised emergency recovery techniques to quickly inform the public, an approach the attending body agreed holds tremendous promise. Archives staff personally treated damaged records for government institutions, private institutions and the general public as well as offered instruction where appropriate.

The third session was chaired by Mr. Kago Sidney Ramokate (representing ESARBICA, the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of ICA, from the Botswana National Archives and Records Services in Gaborone) and Mr. Joan van Albada (Secretary General, ICA). Presentations included a synopsis of what is known about current mass drying and sterilization techniques by the present author (University of Utah Marriott Library, USA). Mr. Alfred Lemmon (Historic New Orleans Collection, Louisiana, USA) described disaster plan failures, building design flaws, and lessons learned in the aftermath of a regional disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. Dr. Sebastian Barteleit (Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany) addressed what has been gleaned from the recovery efforts surrounding September, 2004 fire in Weimar's historic Duchess Anna Alima Library.

The final session, chaired by Mr. Djoko Utomo (Director General, ANRI), focused

on Aceh. Dr. Joyo Winoto (Head of the National Land Agency, Republic of Indonesia) described the losses within his own office, where more than 40 people died and 10% of the bound land record books were lost. The remaining volumes, wet for months, suffered significant mold damage. Using the equipment and expertise provided by the Japanese government (JICA) the books were eventually transported to the National Archives facility in Jakarta. Following flash freezing (-48 to -60 degrees Celsius), the books were freeze dried in 100-volume batches in cycles taking 5-7 days. The books were then unbound and the pages sustaining mold growth were wiped down with a 70/30 solution of ethanol and water. Tattered page edges that did not contain textual material were trimmed away with scissors; the folio sheets were alkalized in an aqueous calcium bicarbonate solution. The sheets were then placed on a continuous wire web from a mechanized leaf casting machine where page losses were pulp-filled and a new 1-inch paper border added to improve durability in handling. The sheets were subsequently dried, collated, and resealed, and the books were rebound. The records were then digitized to increase accessibility and provide a security backup. As of the July 2006 conference, approximately half of the Aceh record books had been dried and restored, and the project anticipated to last another year.

Dr. Kuntoro Mangkusubroto (Director, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) for Aceh and Nias presented a formal update on fund raising and rehabilitation efforts for the region. International funds make up a large part of the restoration effort (3.8 trillion Indonesia Rupiahs, the equivalent of US\$ 417 million has currently been raised, with a projected US\$1 billion still remaining to be collected). Dr. Mangkusubroto emphasized that complete transparency about how the money is being allocated is considered essential to allaying foreign concerns about potential corruption, collusion, and nepotism. A 300+ page report published as an elegantly illustrated book describes BRR's progress after one year. For example, of the 120,000 homes destroyed, 41,734 were rebuilt by April 2006; of the 2006 schools needed, 524 have been built; and of the 2,500 teachers killed, 2,430 substitutes have been hired.⁶

Finally, Mr. Joan van Albada (Secretary General, ICA and President of the International Committee of the Blue Shield – ICBS) concluded with some prepared and some candid comments about Blue Shield. Established in 1996 by four non-governmental organizations (NGOs),⁷ the objectives of the ICBS include: facilitating international responses to emergencies threatening cultural property; encouraging safeguarding and respect for cultural property by promoting risk preparedness; training experts at the national and regional level to prevent, control, and recover from disasters; advising on the protection of endangered heritage; and consulting and

cooperating with other relevant international bodies focused on these goals, such as UNESCO, ICCROM, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Arising from a recognized need to strengthen several provisions within the 1954 Hague convention (which focuses exclusively on the protection of both movable and immovable cultural property), a Second Protocol to the Convention was adopted in the Hague in March 1999. This Protocol established a newly created Committee for the Protections of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and linked it to the ICBS.

Unfortunately, due to the complexity of governmental structures and a frequent unwillingness to cooperate for the common good, preservation of cultural materials remains an unattainable dream and the Blue Shield as currently devised has become a paper tiger. Retarded by bureaucratic ineffectiveness and the lack of universal acceptance for the Hague Convention (to date, only 114 countries have signed the Hague Convention; 92 countries ratified the first protocol; 40 countries have ratified the second), the Blue Shield cannot currently intercede in situations threatening cultural property. However, raising awareness and training people to prepare and thereby lessen the impact of natural disasters is an objective that will hopefully continue to grow.

In addition to the formal program, which included summing up and closing ceremonies by the conference organizers, the conference offered numerous opportunities for colleagues to interact. Catered meals brought people together and lively discussions ensued.

Ironically, the conference title, “The Unexpected Possibilities,” was aptly chosen. The first day of the gathering, a 6.8 earthquake occurred off the southern coast of Java approximately 33 km (20 miles) beneath sea level.⁸ The earthquake triggered a tsunami that struck the opposite side of the same island where the conference was being held less than 290 km (180 miles) away, and approximately 500 people were killed. This served as a grim reminder that the Pacific Ring of Fire, the 40,000 km (24,840 mile) horseshoe-shaped collision zone of tectonic plates, remains extremely active, producing 90% of the Earth’s earthquakes. Fortunately, no archives were adversely affected in this recent event, but “vigilance” and “preparedness” remained the watchwords of this international gathering.

Endnotes

1. Yoshiaki Kawata, et. al. “Comprehensive analysis of the damage and its impact on coastal zones by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster,” Field survey reports for the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami released 28 Dec 2005 by TOHOKU University, recovered from the world wide

web 30 August 2006, <http://www.tsunami.civil.tohoku.ac.jp/sumatra2004/report.html>

2. Tjandra Mualim (ed.), *Reflections on Tsunami, an Oral History* (Jakarta, Indonesia: National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006): 10.

3. Dr. Saroja Wettasangihe, "Role of the National Archives of Sri Lanka in the Aftermath of Tsunami," unpublished typescript, 2006: 1.

4. Dr Wettasangihe, 2006: 1.

5. Anonymous, "JICA in Aceh," unpublished typescript, 2006.

6. [Kuntoro Mangkusubroto], *Building a Land of Hope: One Year Report Executing Agency of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh and Nias* (Banda Aceh, Indonesia: the Agency, 2006).

7. The four NGO sponsors of the International Committee of the Blue Shield include: International Council on Archives (ICA); International Council on Museums (ICOM); International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS); and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

8. "Dozens Killed in Java Tsunami," *Jakarta Post*, (18 July 2006): 1; "Tsunami Death Toll Hits 341," *Jakarta Post*, (19 July 2006): 1.