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Dear Brother Friedl,

With a heavy heart I am sending this small report on the "Tsunami Disaster in Tamil Nadu"

The giant tidal waves (Tsunami) hit the Tamil Nadu coast on the morning of December 26, 2004 following the biggest earthquake in 40 years in the sea bed near Indonesia. It has caused untold devastation and misery in the coastal areas. Picture (1) shows the spread of the waves from Sumatra.

This calamity is unprecedented in its suddenness and ferocity. It has completely ruined Tamil Nadu's coastal economy.

December 26, 2004 was a "Black Sunday" for the people living in the eastern seashore of Tamil Nadu. Monstrous sea waves rising to a height of 10 meters rammed the coast. As a result 9,479 people were killed and 5000 people are missing and therefore presumed dead. This is according to official figures of the Government. But the actual number of the dead would be more and may never be known according to the UN.

There are 13 coastal districts in Tamil Nadu. Of these Chennai, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari are the worst affected by the Tsunami.

CHENNAI :

Chennai's "Marina Beach" one the the vastest beaches in the world was full of children playing in the sand, small vendors and strollers on the "Black Sunday" morning. The Tsunami turned the beach into an incredible scene of the doom and desolation (See Picture 2). Children were killed by the high waves. Fishing boats and cars parked on the beach were washed away. Death toll in Chennai is 206. The fury of the sea was sudden, Cruel and terrifying.

CUDDALORE :

In Cuddalore district, south of Chennai, many fishermen villages were totally destroyed, Devanampattinam being the worst affected, (Picture 3). Houses near the sea were turned into a heap of debris. Thousands were left homeless. Pictures of parents wailing over their dead children are heart - rending (Picture 4).

Cuddalore hospital was turned into a morgue as hundreds of dead bodies were lined up to be claimed by relatives. Unidentified bodies and others washed ashore by the waves were tossed into huge pits and the shore became a "Mass grave" (Picture 5). 603 people have died in Cuddalore.

NAGAPATTINAM :

Nagapattinam district, a further south coastal district was perhaps the most devastated area. so far 5,905 dead bodies have been burried or cremated here.

Everywhere in Nagapattinam one could see broken houses and boats. There were laments and cries all around. The survivors are in trauma and in mental depression. The fear and panic is seen on their vacant faces.

Velankanni, the catholic shrine basilica of our lady of good health, located in Nagapattinam district was not spared by the Tsunami. Thousands of devotees and pilgrims who had come to the basilica the day after the christmas faced their death in the merciless waves (Picture 6). As dead bodies started decomposing, they were burried in mass graves (picture 7,8) in Nagapattinam.

KANYAKUMARI :

Kanyakumari is the southern tip of Tamil Nadu with the sea on three sides. Over 817 people lost their lives here, (picutre 9). Kolachal a coastal village in Kanyakumari is in total ruins.

COASTAL TAMIL NADU - GENERAL PICTURE :

In Tamil Nadu, the loss of property in terms of damaged houses, wrecked fishing boats, fishing nets and dead livestock is estimated at Rs. 3500 Crores (770,000,000 dollars). A million people have been displaced and of these 650,000 are put up in 338 "relief camps". A total of 360 villages along the 300 km coastline were affected (picture 10 to 15).

EMOTIONAL CRISIS :

The Tsunami has been a real crisis in terms of the pain, the agony the psychological fear and phobia it has created in the hearts and minds of the survivors. There are thousands of children without parents and thousands of persons who have lost children or wife or husband. Fishermen don't want to go back to their coastal habitats. They are fear and panic stricken.

HEALTH CRISIS (Fear of epidemics) :

In the affected places, health hazards are likely to bring another wave of death unless precautionary measures are taken. Decomposing dead bodies, lack of sanitation (toilets) in relief camps and unsafe drinking water may cause an outbreak of the epidemics of diarrhoea, cholera and respiratory infections. Malaria might affect people living in the open.

Dear brother Friedl, the suffering of the people who have escaped alive is tremendous. They are like orphans in their own homeland. They need material assistance and emotional support. The tragedy is even more fatal in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Andaman-Nicobar islands (part of India). As our Pope John Paul has observed "The enormous tragedy has saddened Christmas".

Nothing like this has ever happened to India and Asia. The UN has said that Two Million people need food and medical aid.

It may take 10 years for badly affected areas to bring life back to normalcy.

Let us extend a helping hand to our brothers and sisters who are victims of this enormous Tsunami disaster.

Your brother in Christ,

Fr.C.DON BOSCO

NB : 1. I am sending the pictures by courier.

2. Kindly pass on a copy of this to Sascha