

Statement by H.E. Lee Hae-chan,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea

First, on behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Korea, I would like to express my sincere condolences and consolation to the countries, victims and bereaved families greatly affected by the recent tsunami.

The Korean government and people also share your deep grief in the face of this unprecedented disaster.

But even amidst this great tragedy, we are discovering new hope. We have seen the governments, NGOs and business communities, and even countless netizens and children of the world come together in extending their assistance, showing that the world has united as one in response to the terrible disaster.

We would not be able to repair the damage brought about by the tsunami in a short period of time. Even after the world recovers from the initial shock, it will take a long time for residents of affected areas to return to their ordinary lives. Therefore, it is important that we continue to provide assistance to the affected countries and people.

Korea has decided to provide a total of 50 million dollars in assistance packages to the affected countries, which includes not only emergency relief, but also mid-to-long term reconstruction assistance.

First, the Korean government is providing 5 million dollars both in cash and medical/relief supplies. Also, over 700 relief and medical volunteers have already been sent to hard-hit regions to provide assistance.

Even after the emergency relief has been delivered, Korea is fully committed to assisting the affected countries and peoples in rebuilding their lives. Over the next three years, the Korean government will deliver an additional 45 million dollars in reconstruction assistance, focusing on health, education, energy, and telecommunication infrastructure.

We will not only be providing financial assistance, but also the human resources and technology needed for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Furthermore, we will favorably consider measures to further extend soft loans called the EDCF, in order to aid large-scale operations such as the construction of roads and telecommunication networks.

Many of the tsunami-affected areas were coastal tourist attractions, greatly appreciated by people from all over the world for their beautiful scenery and pleasant climate. The Korean government will provide assistance in hopes of a quick recovery of the tourism industry in the region.

In addition to bilateral support, Korea will also proactively participate in joint efforts carried out within international frameworks such as the UN.

To add to the efforts of the government, the Korean civil society is also actively participating in emergency and reconstruction assistance to the affected countries. NGOs, business communities and the people of Korea have collected donations amounting to 14 million dollars, and hundreds of medical and relief volunteers are participating in assistance activities.

The 90 volunteers have accompanied me on the flight to Jakarta to start relief efforts.

I will also be personally heading a 'Public-Private Assistance Partnership Forum', which will hold large-scale donation campaigns among the general public, and dispatch medical and relief volunteers to areas where they are most needed.

The Korean government is confident that this Special Summit will provide a valuable opportunity for the world to come together in establishing a global disaster prevention system.

In today's world, global disaster prevention is just as important as emergency aid to tsunami victims and recovery efforts in the affected regions. Now, major disasters must be monitored not at a national or regional level, but at a global level. In this regard, I think that now is the time to launch a global cooperation network for pre- and post- disaster management.

First, we must connect all of the early warning systems dispersed throughout each region and country into a network, building a single system to exchange information on disaster forecasts and form a joint response to natural disasters. In order to achieve this, disaster forecasting technology and information should be shared for joint research. Korea will exert its utmost efforts to build such a disaster early warning system, especially by providing our technology and know-how on early warning systems using information technology.

Second, we should work within the international fora like the ASEAN+3 and APEC to establish a cooperative disaster prevention system, so that the countries located within the trans-pacific earthquake belt can respond together to natural disasters. In particular, as the chair-country of APEC in 2005, Korea will place top priority on disaster prevention and assistance, and actively lead cooperative efforts to enhance the preventive capabilities of member countries.

No country is free from the threat of global disasters. By aiding stricken countries of today and preparing for future disasters, we are ultimately helping ourselves.

The unprecedented severity of the recent disaster was met by equally unprecedented support from the rest of the world. We have learned from the recent events just how weak and vulnerable mankind is before Mother Nature, and it is now our turn to demonstrate our humility, unwavering resolve and the love that we have for the people of the world.

Korea is ready to help. The government and people of Korea will provide the unwavering support needed to aid the recovery of the devastated countries, and assist the affected people in returning to their ordinary lives.

Thank you.