

# ***GTIF – GLOBAL TOURISM INTERVENTIONS FORUM***

C / O Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism  
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## **TSUNAMI CALL FOR ACTION: RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION**

This Call for Action was launched on the occasion of the Annual Consultation on the 'State of Indian Tourism: Developing Models of Stewardship' organised by EQUATIONS and a strategy meeting of the Global Tourism Interventions Forum.

Three months before the peak tourism season begins, we the participants of the Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF)\*, together with several stakeholders from South Asian countries affected by the tsunami have had intensive deliberations on the tsunami and its impacts. GTIF is extremely concerned about the testimonies and findings of its members and partners working and having conducted research in Tsunami affected areas in India including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in Sri Lanka and Thailand. Therefore GTIF, consequently to its "Call for Action: Solidarity with the Victims of the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean – Solidarity in Tourism?" issued one month after the disaster, at the World Social Forum 2005 in Porto Alegre, is now launching a follow-up call raising the burning issues of reconstruction and rehabilitation with regard to tourism developments.

During this post-tsunami period, the governments of tsunami affected countries, governments of 'donor countries' and the international community have launched a plethora of rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction plans including the WTO-OMT's Phuket Action Plan to bring tourists back to countries, which have been affected by tsunami.

We would like all governments, inter-governmental agencies, aid organisations, the tourism industry and civil society organisations to review the manner in which the impact of the tsunami has been treated.

Natural disasters reflect the imbalance in the relationship between humankind and nature; the modern development model often ignores this reality. We therefore on reflection demand that all protective measures that have been documented using traditional, natural and technological means should be strictly implemented.

To ensure that local needs are addressed, all rehabilitation and reconstruction measures must be designed and implemented by local communities, in accordance with their decisions, conforming to their religion, cultures & lifestyles and using locally available materials, talents and skills.

Governments must ensure that in the Tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction process national guidelines and legislation pertaining to development along the coasts e.g., the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification in India & Coastal Conservation Act of Sri Lanka are strictly implemented to protect the environment and livelihood resources of local inhabitants. This includes respecting international conventions and agreements on human rights and sustainable development of the UN and its Bodies -

such as the Declaration of Human Rights, the Conventions of the Rights of Women and the Rights of the Child, the ILO-Conventions - in particular the core labour rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the conventions, recommendations and action plans of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Agenda 21 and sustainable tourism principles, and in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity. Government guidelines, regulations and processes of implementing tourism should reflect local concerns and ensure that tourism does not replace local economies, displace people and result in unsustainable use of natural resources.

- Aid should be collected and disbursed through a mechanism, which does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, religion, social status, gender, caste or creed. Governments must guarantee that the rehabilitation process will not lead to further displacement of local communities already displaced by the tsunami.
- Apart from material aid it is important for governments and aid organisations to identify gross human rights violations and criminal activities such as rape, human trafficking – especially of children, and corruption which are taking place during the rehabilitation process and punish the offenders.
- It is evident from ground level inputs/ observations that governments have failed to maintain basic standards of relief & rehabilitation. Aid agencies have adopted dual standards in providing temporary structures for affected people and have shown insensitivity to living conditions, e.g. by providing tin-sheet huts in hot & humid areas with little or no ventilation. We question the rationale for low standards adopted by aid agencies in affected developing countries.
- Special teams should be created to deal with the trauma aspects and give comfort to affected populations.
- We have a special concern regarding the care of children orphaned by the tsunami and hope that organisations experienced in this field will take up this call. Communities should be financially supported and trained to keep their children within the community itself rather than give them up for adoption. The compensation money should not be completely used up but should be maintained in a trust till the children come of age while for teenagers a hostel could be set up.
- In affected areas that have a history of social/ political conflicts, the approach of the governments should not discriminate against disaster victims because they are political refugees .
- For a thorough understanding of the long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts of the tsunami, governments must commission research studies to analyse the trends in labour displacement, human trafficking and other issues as well as the sustainability of coastal developments. This must be supported with complete transparency on information regarding use of relief grants and an assessment of how they have helped the situation on the ground. Governments should thereby

be supported by the international community, by the UN, 'donor' countries and aid organisations for an efficient monitoring of the long-term impacts of the tsunami.

- In its precautionary and preparedness efforts for future disasters of this nature, governments should not build on costly high technology warnings systems alone, but must recognise the significance of traditional, low technology community-based early warning systems and strengthen them.
- In the wake of a natural disaster like the tsunami and its consequent impacts on local livelihoods, we demand that the tourism industry proves its longstanding claim of pursuing 'tourism as a development activity' and justify their claims of bringing benefits to the local community, conserving local resources and safeguarding labour rights.
- The tourism industry must abide by regional, national and international regulations regarding tourism development and be transparent with their industry partners as well as tourists on the extent to which such tourism stands to benefit the local community at destinations.
- While the tourism industry must not deviate from its core business by assuming an all-important role in the rehabilitation process, it must also acknowledge that corporate responsibility in the wake of such disaster cannot be limited to donations alone. Corporate responsibility in tourism includes:
  - A focus on ethics in the overall management of the tourism business
  - Responsibility towards the people who have helped to build the industry and thereby addressing the labour rights and displacement issues surfacing in the post-tsunami period, including the tourism labour force in the informal sector
  - Consequently, a guarantee of employment for local people dependent on the industry for their livelihoods in the coming tourist season
  - Social security for small and medium enterprises within the industry
  - Recognition of the priority use of basic resources like land, water, sanitation and other infrastructures for the livelihood of the local inhabitants
- In areas where small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) have been affected, it is the responsibility of the governments to provide adequate assistance for them to build a sustainable future; SMEs rarely have the competency/ capacity to raise loans and claim insurances.
- Government tourism departments/ agencies and the tourism industry are attempting to showcase affected areas as '*safe havens*' thereby projecting insensitivity to ground issues. There is need, therefore, to stop such advertisements and instead a true picture be presented to tourists; provide them information to take informed decisions on travel and increase their sensitivity to ground issues.

- Tourists should demand transparency from tour operators on aspects of local community benefit from their tourism activities to enable informed decision-making on their choice of tourism destinations and activities. The tsunami has intensified the need for tourists to be sensitive towards the receiving societies and thereby respect the human and socio-cultural rights of local communities.

**\*The Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF) was created in recognition of ongoing debates on tourism development that have taken place in consultations around the globe, the World Social Forum and international fora like the CSD. The GTIF seeks to support, strengthen and sustain the debate and interventions on tourism issues within a multitude of anti-globalisation and human rights movements, and is committed to change the character of global tourism. In solidarity with local movements, we work together with community representatives, activists, and researchers in various parts of the world to strengthen our struggle for a tourism that is equitable, people centred, sustainable, ecologically sensible, child friendly and gender just.**

Signed by:

Alternative Tourism Group - ATG

arbeitskreis tourismus & entwicklung - AKTE

Asian Muslim Action Network - AMAN

Christian Conference of Asia - CCA

Committee of Islamic Relief Organisations - CIRO

Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism - ECOT

EQUATIONS

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Nina Rao

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