

Two solitudes: post-tsunami and post-conflict Aceh

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In August 2005, after the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean Basin, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the cessation of hostilities was signed by Aceh's longstanding adversaries—the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The tsunami was a major catalyst for 'disaster diplomacy'—international political pressure, which, this paper argues, was an important ingredient in creating conditions for the MoU, although the situation within Aceh also shaped the peace process. Based on interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007 with government officials, GAM representatives and fighters, and non-governmental organization staff in Aceh, this paper finds that assistance for tsunami survivors far exceeds that available for conflict survivors and ex-combatants. The formation of these two solitudes—the tsunami-affected and the conflict-affected—compounds challenges for sustaining peace in Aceh. This research points to an enduring lack of livelihoods for former fighters and conflict victims that may threaten a sustainable peace.

Keywords: Aceh, conflict, disasters, humanitarian assistance, international aid, tsunami

Introduction

This article explores the intersection of the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia, and the 2004 Indian Ocean Basin tsunami, as well as the extraordinary attention and aid it brought to bear on the situation in Aceh. It aims to analyse the specific geographies of the 'dual disasters'—the war and the tsunami—exposing the very separate flows of aid to those affected. The two disasters overlapped geographically within Aceh Province, but not in terms of who was most adversely affected. And yet, the arrival of international tsunami assistance was in part predicated on the cessation of hostilities. In other words, while the timing of aid for tsunami recovery and support for the peace agreement, known as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU),¹ coincided, the populations and areas in which these were targeted did not.

Most of the international aid has been directed towards helping tsunami victims living along the coast. Far more modest assistance has been provided to those most severely affected by the conflict, most of whom live in areas that were not directly affected by the tsunami, a few kilometres farther inland. Human and financial resources for tsunami reconstruction dwarf those for post-conflict recovery and re-integration. While there have been economic incentives for the elites of the former

secessionist Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) to augment political cooperation, the vast majority of demobilized rebels and their families have received very little assistance.

Assistance for tsunami survivors far exceeds that available for those adversely affected by the conflict or, to be more precise, the *end* of the conflict. As a former GAM rebel noted: ‘The tsunami victims were the lucky ones. [. . .] At least they got help’ (Honorine, 2007). The relatively small number of aid agencies assisting those persons intensely affected by conflict is reflected in this mismatch of funds allocated for each disaster. The reintegration of ex-combatants and other groups emerges as one of the more salient challenges in post-tsunami, post-MoU Aceh, as argued by a representative of the US Agency for International Development in January 2007:

The government needs to address the reintegration of more than 3,000 ex-combatants, 6,200 GAM non-combatants, 2,000 amnestied prisoners, 2,000 ex-combatants who surrendered prior to the MoU, and 6,500 militia, as well as deal with the 63,000 conflict victims, the 2,000 handicapped, and rebuilding 9,149 destroyed houses. [. . .] There are, however, financial constraints: while almost USD 8 billion is committed to dealing with the aftermath of the tsunami, only USD 200 million is pledged for reintegration efforts (Hollenbeck, 2007).

In field research conducted in 2006–08, this research team probed the articulation of post-tsunami responses and peace negotiations, and aimed to identify the corresponding aid landscapes related to each. In 2007 and 2008, several interview respondents indicated that grievances based on a perceived lack of assistance and emerging economic disparities for many former GAM members constituted a potential threat to a hitherto successful peace process.

This research began with a guiding question: to what extent, if any, did the tsunami shape the peace process in Aceh? In Sri Lanka, the ceasefire of 2002 ended in 2008, at which point war returned with a vengeance, until the Sri Lankan military defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, at great cost to civilian life, in May 2009. In contrast, the tsunami and its massive aid infusion were not solely responsible for ending the conflict in Aceh, but they did hasten the process (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007). Yet understanding how political space was created for change and how it succeeded in creating peace in Aceh remains vital to understanding other conflict-resolution efforts.

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted by the first author (Waizenegger) in 2006 and 2008, and on jointly conducted interviews, meetings and one focus group held with 14 ex-combatants in June 2007 (Hyndman and Waizenegger). In all three rounds of research, the methods consisted primarily of semi-structured interviews with a range of humanitarian and political actors involved in tsunami reconstruction, post-conflict reintegration and political representation in the transformed post-MoU political landscape. Interviews were conducted in English and Bahasa Indonesia, depending on the informant’s preference. The jointly conducted research in 2007 involved contacting various senior Government of Indonesia (GoI) officials

at the Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias (Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi, BRR) and the Aceh Peace Reintegration Agency (Badan Reintegrasi Damai Aceh, BRA), leaders of all political parties, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations representatives and experts based at local NGOs, including a number of civil society NGOs working on the issues of gender, environment and relief. Representation from all these groups is included in the analysis. This research highlights the different geographies of tsunami-affected vs. conflict-affected populations and of aid systems established to respond to the two disasters.

The next section provides the context of conflict before the tsunami. It is followed by an analysis of the tsunami in relation to the MoU and peace process, and argues that the tsunami was a key catalyst, not a cause, of the MoU. It accelerated and amplified the prevalent social and political dynamics towards peace on the ground. Next comes an exploration of the causes and consequences of the production of the ‘two solitudes’—‘aid scapes’ for the tsunami-affected on the one hand and for the conflict-affected on the other—which, this paper contends, compound challenges for sustaining peace in Aceh. Finally, this study points to the need for increased attention to addressing the reintegration of ex-combatants and the recovery of livelihoods of all victims of the conflict as a constructive measure towards stabilizing Aceh’s society.

Antecedents to conflict and peace

Aceh has been recognised by world powers as a sovereign state since the 16th century.

—GAM Prime Minister (in exile) Malik Mahmood (Mahmood, 2005)

The Indonesian province of Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, is characterized by a long history of strong resistance against European colonialists and their local allies (Reid, 2006). The most recent hostilities were marked by widespread repression and human rights abuses by the conflicting parties, namely the Indonesian Military Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) and GAM. These hostilities lasted for more than three decades, and are partly rooted in Aceh’s earlier role in the region as well as in its relation to the emerging Indonesian state in the 1940s. For example, when Dutch forces recaptured Indonesia in 1946 after Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, Aceh remained the only free region of the archipelago, pointing to a pronounced political autonomy long before Indonesia’s international recognition of sovereignty in 1949.

Accordingly, discontent triggered armed resistance among the Acehnese elites over the establishment of a secular Indonesian state and Aceh’s marginal role in it. President Sukarno succeeded in pacifying the Acehnese through military counter-insurgency as well as the political concession of reaffirming Aceh’s formerly held separate provincial status and granting it the additional status of a ‘special region’ (*Daerah Istimewa*) in 1959 (Wandelt, 2005). But Sukarno’s political nemesis, Suharto,

became president in 1966 and stoked Acehese discontent during his rule. Feelings of exploitation soared among Aceh's population in 1971, when huge oil and liquid natural gas deposits were discovered near Lhokseumawe and Lhoksukon in North Aceh. Exploration was followed by the construction of the biggest refinery in the world at the time, financed as a joint venture between the Indonesian state-owned Pertamina company and ExxonMobil (Reid, 2006; Ross, 2003).

The people of Aceh were largely left out of the royalties and prosperity that followed from this resource extraction, leading to the emergence of GAM, an independence movement founded by a small group of Acehese elites. Its armed struggle was rapidly suppressed by the TNI. With growing battle forces during the ensuing decades, the TNI and GAM committed gross human rights abuses against suspected collaborators with the enemy party (Schulze, 2004; HRW, 2001). Within what the TNI considered a context of guerilla warfare, counterinsurgency strategies were perceived as the only chance to counter GAM. Yet this practice fuelled the hatred and nationalism among a large part of Aceh's population against Indonesian rule and the army. In turn, this anger sustained the recruitment and support for GAM's armed resistance (Nessen, 2006; Sukma, 2004).

Against this background of secessionist ambition characterized by nationalism and widespread poverty, on 26 December 2004 a submarine earthquake registering 9.0 on the Richter scale triggered a tsunami that hit the coasts of war-torn Aceh, costing the lives of about 167,000 people (4% of Aceh's population). About half a million more were displaced (15% of the population), and the already miserable humanitarian, social and economic situation in the province dramatically worsened due to the tsunami (BRR and Partners, 2005; GoI, 2005; TEC, 2006). While the then newly elected Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared the catastrophe a 'national disaster' on the following day (GoI, 2006), he also requested military restraint while Aceh's secessionist movement committed to a unilateral ceasefire to facilitate relief operations. Ensuing official negotiations between GAM and the Indonesian government, which had been secretly prepared before the tsunami, led to a more stable cessation of hostilities after the Memorandum of Understanding for peace was signed on 15 July 2005 (Merikallio, 2005; ICG, 2005a; 2005b; *Modus*, 2005; *Tempo*, 2005).

The historical context of Acehese nationalism

Hasan di Tiro is a descendant of the last sultan of Aceh and a direct descendant of Teuku Cik di Tiro, a famous Acehese national hero of the Aceh War (1873–1903). Hasan di Tiro owned Doral International, an oil conglomerate that lost exploration rights for the oil and gas deposits on Aceh's east coast against a joint venture between the state-owned oil company Pertamina, the Indonesian military and ExxonMobil. His defeat in the oil deal, along with a lack of an adequate repatriation of royalties from Aceh's extractive industries, were seen as a renewed expression of the unjust Javanese exploitation and domination of the province (Barter, 2004). This

Table 1 Key events, casualties and GAM strength

Phase	I: 1976–79	II: 1989–91	III: 1999–2005			
Key events	Founding of GAM	DOM/ Military Operations Zone	Humanitarian pause: 2000–01	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement: Dec. 2002– May 2003	Martial law/ state of emergency: May 2003– May 2005	MoU: Aug. 2005
Casualties	100	2,000– 10,000	5,000			
GAM strength	25–200	200–750	15,000–27,000			

Source: World Bank (2006a).

perceived slight served to reinforce the native elite's strong ethno-nationalist sentiments. As a former supporter of the Darul Islam Rebellion² in 1976, di Tiro initiated the Aceh–Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF), commonly known as the Free Aceh Movement, which issued its 'Declaration of Independence of Aceh–Sumatra'.³ After numerous skirmishes with the TNI and heavy human rights abuses by both sides, di Tiro and most of his surviving followers fled to Sweden and established an exile government in 1979 (Schulze, 2003). This exile government has remained in place and was vital in the peace negotiations, culminating in the signing of the MoU for peace 2005, more than 25 years later.

Continued lack of access to oil and gas revenues, the transmigration of Javanese to Aceh⁴ (seen as a tactic by the government to 'Indonesianize' its rebellious province), the GoI's treatment of Aceh's cultural and religious customs, the politics of impunity and massive abuses by Indonesian government forces in 1989–98 (the Military Operations Zone or 'DOM' period) increased resentment among the population and sustained the secessionist struggle (Sukma, 2004; HRW, 2001). While GAM was initially a small and poorly equipped guerrilla group that was rapidly suppressed by the Indonesian military, it increasingly challenged the Indonesian government's control of the province during DOM—and that despite a ratio of roughly 1 GAM for every 15 TNI troops (Ross, 2003) (see Table 1).

This challenge was rooted in GAM's strategy of 'internationalization', which included leadership and funding from the political–military diaspora in Sweden, training in and funding from Libya between 1986 and 1989 (Schulze, 2003; Ross, 2003) and the supply of arms from Cambodia, Thailand and India (Wandelt, 2005; Interview 25). Starting in 1997, GAM sought the international attention of allies in the conflict while trying to pressure the GoI into peace negotiations. In persisting with internationalization as a political strategy, GAM aimed to gain the best bargaining position possible for its struggle for independence (Interview 37). After 2000, GAM succeeded with this strategy (Schulze, 2004); the TNI's goal, however, was to eliminate the separatist movement (General Suharto cited in Sukma, 2004, p. 24) or to force GAM into accepting the offers of Jakarta (Miller, 2006).

The financial crisis and East Timor's separation from Indonesia

The fall of President Suharto from power in May 1998 ushered in greater openness and hope that the conflict in Aceh could be resolved. His departure was precipitated in part by the financial crisis in Southeast Asia, but also by the end of the cold war and a new geopolitical distance introduced by allies such as the United States, which had earlier turned a blind eye to Indonesia's domestic human rights abuses. Although the financial disaster in much of Southeast Asia did lead to a suspension of hostilities and greater self-rule for Aceh, these effects were only temporary. In 1999, following a referendum, East Timor gained independence and separated from Indonesia. President Abdurrahman Wahid, who took power in October 1999, fuelled separatist expectations of the Acehnese by raising the possibility of a referendum on the status of Aceh. GAM members began to return from exile and hideouts in support of the referendum and GAM seemed to become more and more 'like a government in waiting' (Reid, 2006, p. 28). Student organizations coalesced to form the Centre for an Aceh Referendum (Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh) and held pro-referendum rallies (McCulloch, 2005; Aguswandi, 2004a).

With pressure from hard-line Indonesian nationalist military actors and limited political will for such change in Jakarta, however, Wahid withdrew his offer of a referendum on and for Aceh. Despite peace talks facilitated by the Swiss-based NGO Henry Dunant Centre (HDC)⁵ and the signature of a 'humanitarian pause' agreement in May 2000 between the GoI and GAM, hostilities resumed within months (Kay, 2003). Under President Wahid, the TNI launched a new security operation against GAM after attacks on ExxonMobil in April 2001 forced the company to shut down its operations (Sukma, 2004; Iyer and Mitchell, 2004).

President Megawati Sukarnoputri came to power on 23 July 2001 and passed special autonomy legislation No. 18 designed by Wahid, which included Aceh's right to a higher share of natural resource revenue; to implement Sharia law and set up Sharia courts; to create symbols of autonomous government; and to rename the province Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (McCulloch, 2005). In December 2002, renewed HDC-brokered peace talks resulted in the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA); this established a Joint Security Committee with representatives from both the TNI and GAM, as well as a team of Southeast Asian monitors. Despite sporadic clashes, peace zones were declared and international aid pledges for reconstruction made in the event that the CoHA succeeded (Prasodjo and Hamid, 2005). Final peace negotiations by the Joint Security Committee in May 2003 failed and President Megawati immediately declared martial law in Aceh; this was replaced by a state of civil emergency one year later.

The TNI then embarked on the largest military operation since East Timor, with 40,000 troops and 12,000 police present in Aceh. It again aggravated the conditions of the Acehnese people, killing thousands and, according to the human rights NGO Tapol (2004), displacing at least 125,000 persons.⁶ Aceh was closed to independent human rights groups, journalists and foreign citizens in general (Laksono, 2005). The

TNI governed the public sphere in Aceh; local media and civil society movements were strongly impeded by a repressive administration (Suud, 2005). Nevertheless, segments of civil society continuously lobbied—mainly via the Internet and through exiled activists in foreign countries—for political national and international involvement to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.⁷

During 2004, however, attention to the conflict in Aceh declined due to the presidential elections campaign. As a Tapol *Bulletin* comments, ‘the war in Aceh has become a forgotten war, internationally and in Indonesia’ (Tapol, 2004, p. 1). On the ground, GAM’s capacity to do battle was strongly impeded when the TNI killed 6,000—or about one-quarter of—GAM combatants, plus thousands of people associated with GAM (ICG, 2005a; Nessen, 2006; Interview 37). GAM’s extensive supply, intelligence and political networks—which were critical to its guerrilla-style warfare—substantially broke down, and GAM ran short of weapons, ammunition and equipment (Interview 37; Nessen, 2006). As a consequence, GAM was pushed out of the cities and villages and into the forests (Pan, 2005). During the second half of 2004, GAM was forced to retreat into a defensive position (Interview 37). Although this situation never threatened GAM’s survival, numerous commanders were keen for an exit strategy (Pan, 2005; Nessen, 2006). The general mood among Aceh’s population and its belief in future peace in Aceh were restrained by the collapse of CoHA, on the one hand, and on the other, by TNI’s increasing local presence and power. The common aim of most people in Aceh was to abandon terror and forge peace. Consequently:

A large part of the Acehnese people who formerly supported GAM became neutral in their position towards the conflicting parties. Most of the people were just longing for peace (Interview 17).

Political transformation precipitated by the financial crisis created a context of constraints that led to the failure of peace initiatives.⁸ This disaster had little impact on Indonesia–Aceh relations and intra–Aceh conflict dynamics. Rather, it provoked a crisis of legitimacy and authority within the government that was epitomized by the violent transfer of sovereignty in East Timor and addressed in Aceh by further military repression.

In search of a solution: Indonesia’s third attempt to end conflict

The change of presidential leadership in Indonesia, from Megawati to Gen. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, gave Acehnese people a small glimpse of hope and finally proved to be favourable to a new peace process.⁹ Elected in September 2004 (and re-elected in 2009) and having dealt directly with the Aceh conflict as Minister of Politics and Security under President Megawati, Yudhoyono wanted to end the conflict in Aceh (Neuwirth et al., 2006; Askandar, 2006). Yudhoyono appeared more

sincere about pursuing a negotiated outcome than any of his predecessors; during his campaign, he offered serious political participation and amnesty to GAM in exchange for accepting autonomy rather than independence. To achieve this compromise, he assigned Vice President Jusuf Kalla, a former minister of Megawati and the leader of the Golkar party, to engage in dialogue with GAM. Furthermore, thanks to Yudhoyono's strong and popular mandate—which included 78% of the vote in Aceh¹⁰—and the trust he received from the parliamentary majority, the president was in a unique position to introduce profound political change in Aceh. Finally, Yudhoyono's connection to and influence over the military proved to be an asset rather than a liability since these links gave the government greater control over the TNI. In the context of Indonesia's continued democratization and decentralization, these conditions created space for political change before the tsunami hit.

Tsunamis for peace: disaster diplomacy and the MoU of 2005

President Yudhoyono and the leaders of Free Aceh Movement turned the tragedy of the tsunami into an opportunity—an opportunity to build peace in Aceh.

—Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, message to the conference commemorating the first anniversary of the signing of the MoU between the GoI and GAM (UNIS, 2006, p. 1)

Kelman and Gaillard (2007) describe 'disaster diplomacy' as the extent to which disaster-related activities—including prevention and mitigation activities or response and recovery—induce cooperation between enemy parties on national or international scales.¹¹ In relation to Aceh, these authors use specific criteria to determine whether disaster diplomacy made a difference. Consistent with other analyses of conflict and disaster, Kelman and Gaillard contend that disaster-related activities frequently catalyse diplomatic progress, but rarely create it. The authors note that the tsunami, and the relief and reconstruction operations that followed, opened up Aceh to the world, ending the province's government-imposed isolation and invisibility. In Aceh, the tsunami created new political space for change (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007), but the seeds of peace were already in place before 26 December 2004, as longstanding secret negotiations between the conflicting parties culminated in an agreement to official peace talks four days before the tsunami struck (Merikallio, 2005; ICG, 2005a; *Tempo*, 2005).¹² Kelman and Gaillard argue persuasively that international involvement fostered a call for a ceasefire so that post-tsunami aid could reach Aceh. The international community facilitated the peace talks and supported the EU–ASEAN collaboration to monitor the peace agreement.

This paper does not dispute that analysis, but posits that the political and economic landscape *inside* Aceh was also transformed after the tsunami and is important in explaining the political transformation to peace. Social, cultural and political

considerations on the ground conditioned prospects for peace in a number of ways. In the interviews conducted in June 2007, all but one respondent saw a strong connection between the impact of the tsunami and the attainment of an MoU for peace. They regarded the tsunami as a ‘key to change’, a ‘chance for peace’, an ‘exit plan from the war’, as ‘helping’, ‘contributing’ and ‘supportive to the peace process’. The tsunami created suffering that in turn motivated the parties in conflict ‘to sit together’ alongside the population and to bring the war to an end. In most instances, the tsunami was religiously interpreted as *vonis* (punishment) for Aceh and Indonesia for waging war, with the peace agreement constituting the *hikmah* (lesson and blessing) drawn from this punishment. Without the tsunami, the majority of informants maintained that conflict would have gone on for years.

Interviewees were asked: ‘What effect did the tsunami have on the peace process?’ A pattern emerged in their responses:

GAM looked at the humanitarian side and decided it could not go on. The Indonesian government saw the same; regardless of if they wanted to or not, they had to sign the MoU.

—Ex-GAM commander, now representative of the Aceh Transition Committee (Komite Peralihan Aceh, KPA)¹³ (Interview 201)

The seeds were already planted pre-tsunami in 2000. We need to see that the peace agreement follows through for five to ten years, not just two years as we have now.

—NGO lawyer (Interview 202)

The general direction for peace was there but the tsunami helped a lot.

—NGO trainer doing reintegration work (Interview 205)

Yes, the tsunami made a difference [. . .]. GAM leadership in Sweden had a change of heart post-tsunami.

—Senior member of the KPA (Interview 208)

Thanks to the tsunami, Indonesia is willing to embark on change [. . .]. The tsunami is the key to change the fences between Jakarta and Aceh.

—Leader of a newly formed political party (Interview 213)

Many of these responses were moving testimonies to the markers of loss, devastation and shock created by the tsunami. Asked why this time peace has held much longer than in previous times, many respondents mentioned the tsunami as a factor.

The economic dimensions of the tsunami also contributed to promoting a resolution of the conflict, notably by providing a peace dividend to the elite of GAM in particular (Waizenegger, 2007). Besides private business opportunities in the reconstruction business¹⁴ (Aditjondro, 2007), these opportunities also included posts for some high-ranking ‘political’ GAM with the national reconstruction and reintegration bodies, BRR and BRA, respectively. This was agreed upon in the 2005 MoU: ‘GAM will nominate representatives to participate fully at all levels in the commission established to conduct the post-tsunami reconstruction (BRR)’ (GoI and

GAM, 2005, para. 1.3.9). As is argued below, however, while ‘buying peace’ through the support of the former rebel elite has helped to bring about some stability at the outset of the peace process, it also began to threaten unity and harmony in Aceh’s society by creating a divide between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ two years later.

The task of implementing reintegration and post-conflict recovery in general is the responsibility of the BRA, which was established in February 2006 by Aceh’s local administration. Besides compensating former rebels, this agency was also tasked with distributing compensation for victims of the conflict and for rehabilitating public and private property destroyed or damaged as a consequence of the conflict. Having little experience and few skills in the field of its mandate, the BRA has been denounced for its general poor performance and for lacking policy direction, expert knowledge on reintegration, transparency and accountability (Beek, 2007; ICG, 2007). Potential beneficiaries were confused, angry and dissatisfied with the BRA as procedures kept shifting and proposals were frequently not accepted for any solid reason. Many of the allocated funds were not spent efficiently and partly fell prey to corruption. By mid-2008, the agency has disbursed funds to 5,726 conflict-affected villages, with disbursements ranging from \$6,500 to \$18,000 (Rayan, 2007).

Problems regarding the reintegration of former combatants were already apparent at the outset of BRA’s formation, partly due to the drafting of the MoU text, which did not include expert consultations on reintegration (Avonius, 2007).¹⁵ Individual benefit compensation to only 3,000 (of around 15,000) former combatants as stipulated in the MoU, instead of a comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process for all, resulted in renewed injustice, deprivation, and frustration. An overburdened BRA and its ‘protective attitude’ towards foreign advice and cooperation (Interview 322), as well as a general delay in the delivery of funds by the GoI, made matters worse.

In addition to the economic dimension, the geographical and temporal aspects of the tsunami disaster also contributed to the resolution of the conflict. Unlike in Sri Lanka, where spaces of high-intensity conflict and severe tsunami impact coincided, Aceh’s spaces were more separate. The dual disasters—the tsunami and the conflict—overlapped slightly, but not in a major way. This was favourable to the peace process because it reduced the risk of competition over and politicization of relief by the warring parties (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007). As noted, the rapid onset of the tsunami helped bring about a high degree of general attention and scrutiny to Aceh and Indonesia, thus supporting a more urgent resolution of the conflict. Finally, and most importantly, the timing of the tsunami (shortly after the conflicting parties agreed to official negotiations) was beneficial to catalysing the ongoing effort for finding a political solution to the conflict.

As Naomi Klein (2007) powerfully argues, Milton Friedman’s crisis hypothesis has so far proven to be right: ‘Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around’ (Friedman and Friedman, 1982, p. ix). It follows that political change was not only the result of the idea of peace ‘lying around’, but also the will for peace

forged before the tsunami. The crisis was then used to leverage political change to stop the conflict.

To date, the rehabilitation and reconstruction process has fostered and secured the peace process and led to a dramatic decrease in everyday violence. In particular, the internationalization of the disaster—along with the massive influx and presence of ‘foreign eyes and ears’ in Aceh—has galvanized political stability. Yet, four years on, this paper argues that the two separate ‘aid scapes’ established in Aceh have also contributed to increasing levels of crime, violence and social tensions in the province.¹⁶ These tensions include economic grievances, jealousy and frustration among those in need who are still struggling with the psychological and economic consequences of armed conflict and its termination, and those who find themselves deprived of assistance and left with little improvement in their own living conditions despite the massive aid intervention. Generous assistance for the tsunami victims and ‘sweet deals’ for many former higher-ranking GAM members have created a class of post-crisis ‘winners’, but also a clear class of ‘losers’ who see themselves excluded from the spoils of peace and disaster.

Disjointed disaster landscapes—disjointed aid landscapes

The destruction the tsunami brought about in Aceh was catastrophic, yet, ‘in many ways conflict-affected areas have experienced more extensive [but less graphic] damage than the tsunami-affected areas’ and conflict has displaced more families from their villages than the tsunami (World Bank, 2007, p. 88; text in brackets added). Despite the money and assistance readily available for tsunami reconstruction, relatively few funds exist to integrate GAM rebels and to rehabilitate infrastructure, houses, livelihoods and health conditions of other victims of the conflict.

After the tsunami struck the coastlines of Aceh in late 2004, it took another eight months until the warring parties agreed to peace. Wary of international involvement in Aceh in a setting of ongoing armed conflict, the GoI and the TNI initially restricted access to ‘conflict areas’. Unfortunately, these policy-led restrictions on all foreign agencies affected aid delivery to the conflict-affected areas. In areas where conflict and tsunami internally displaced person (IDP) camps neighboured each other, it was ‘strictly forbidden to let any assistance cross the line between “humanitarian” tsunami IDPs and “political” conflict IDPs’ (Interview 308). Yet after the MoU was signed and restrictions were lifted, hardly any foreign aid agency became open to the idea of also assisting the conflict victims who were not affected by the tsunami. Cautious in their diplomatic relations with Indonesia, bilateral and multilateral organizations in particular were still very consciously keeping the conflict issue operationally and geographically out of their aid delivery programmes. Most of the international NGOs that came to Aceh after the tsunami to assist its victims were not even aware of the conflict context: ‘many actually came and left and never understood that at all’ (Interview 330). Of the agencies that became aware of conflict

victims being disadvantaged in the delivery of assistance, very few were willing or able to do something about it.

In contrast to bi- or multilateral aid agencies, international NGOs and their local partners can, in theory, act much more independently of diplomatic concerns. Nonetheless, they face another similarly paralysing restriction: donor intent. Their funding was earmarked for tsunami-related needs only. Most of the few agencies also assisting 'only' conflict-affected persons were NGOs that had experience working in Aceh before the tsunami; they were aware of the fate of the conflict victims and thus made sure funds were not exclusively used to assist tsunami victims.¹⁷

Whereas the tsunami preceded the cessation of armed conflict and had its most graphic impacts on the northern and western coasts of Aceh, the conflict was most intense along Aceh's eastern coast (BRR and Partners, 2008; Good et al., 2006; HIC and OCHA, 2005). As a result, international tsunami aid did not touch on the poverty and destruction inflicted by the conflict over the past 29 years. The 'good news' of peace in the wake of the tsunami, in contrast to the very graphic 'bad news' of the tsunami itself, has largely concealed the devastated livelihoods and hardships inflicted on people by a relatively 'ordinary' war. The peace process gained ground in early 2006 and, by the middle of that year, most of the large aid agencies had become aware of emerging disparities in the level of needs vs. assistance to each disaster-affected population. Nevertheless, by mid-2007, very few agencies had lifted restrictions to extend their project areas beyond the immediate coastline and assist the victims of the conflict.¹⁸

Polarization of the disaster-affected: tsunami vs. post-conflict survivors

Public concern about the mismatch of aid to tsunami-related needs versus conflict-related needs did not crystallize until more than two years after the tsunami. Regents and majors then called on aid agencies to shift their focus away from the tsunami victims and towards the victims of the conflict.¹⁹ Similarly, the head of BRR, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, then stressed the need to integrate post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes with post-conflict reintegration programmes; at the Coordination Forum for Aceh and Nias in April 2007 in Jakarta, he asked, 'How can we only carry out reconstruction process in coastal areas, while 5 kilometres away there is an area destroyed by conflict?' (Serambi, 2007). He declared that, 'In the future, the two must be rebuilt in an integrated way' (Serambi, 2007). At the same time, however, he acknowledged that so far donors had expressed their commitment and contribution only to post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

The exclusive and enormous post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation effort has exacerbated long-standing disparities in development patterns between the relatively prosperous coastal areas and the underdeveloped hinterland. Although livelihoods and job opportunities are still the main priority for a large part of the two disaster-affected populations (World Bank, 2007), those affected by the end of conflict are particularly disadvantaged. Former combatants who either fought for GAM or against it as members of anti-GAM militias lost their occupation.

We also find a lot of dissatisfaction among GAM themselves. Their job is to fight, so now they are unemployed. They face problems feeding their families (Interview 202).

Where people are unskilled in activities other than warfare, unemployment and poverty is especially grave. In 2006, 75% of the ex-combatants in Aceh were still unemployed (World Bank, 2006b). Two years later, the situation largely remained unchanged. Among the persons interviewed for this study in June 2007, insufficient economic reintegration of ex-combatants remained a critical issue with regard to peace in Aceh: 'The priority is jobs and reintegration funds. The MoU stipulates this, but only 3–4% has been allocated,' complained a KPA spokesperson (Interview 115). Most of the 15,000 GAM ex-combatants have not had regular work since the MoU was signed in 2005. Many former GAM members—including combatants, non-combatants and prisoners given amnesty—are frustrated (Interview 208). In the town of Sigli, about a 90-minute drive east of Banda Aceh, a meeting was held with 14 working-class men who had fought for GAM or who had gone to Malaysia, either for work as labourers or for political protection. Those living in Malaysia had returned after the tsunami, hoping that they would find work at home. Twelve of the 14 men said they were less satisfied with and 'sadder' about their situation in 2007 than they were during the conflict. Most spoke of plans to start businesses or small farms, but none had the capital to do it, echoing Hollenbeck's (2007) findings.²⁰

No land in sight for former combatants

The gulf between the specific needs and levels of assistance provided to each disaster-affected community has grown as problems in post-conflict Aceh have emerged. Besides a boost in the number of local conflicts along the east coast (the former stronghold of GAM and place of origin of many GAM leaders),²¹ reported incidents of petty crime, robberies, kidnappings and extortion have steadily increased,²² indicating dissatisfaction and persistent economic pressures among the conflict's victims and perpetrators (World Bank/DSF, 2007a; ICG, 2007; AP, 2008; Serambi, 2008a).²³ Deprived of assistance and job opportunities, many former combatants resorted to raising funds illegally, a skill they acquired during the conflict (Aspinall, 2008).

Reintegrating former combatants into society by ensuring livelihood recovery and social security is one of the most pressing issues complicating a hitherto stable peace process. There is no question that demobilized soldiers can represent a security problem if they do not receive adequate official support in the wake of the conflict or if they lack access to alternative livelihoods, especially if they are returning to impoverished families. In Indonesian culture, this danger has been expressed in the term *preman*, which originally referred to irregular or demobilized soldiers²⁴ (Ryter, 2000); nowadays the word is used in reference to (political) 'gangsters' or 'bandits' often associated with the extortion of illegal rents or involvement in illegal businesses or related conduct (Lindsey, 2001). Such extortion is very much reflected in the current aid landscape in Aceh (Serambi, 2008b).

An abundance of tsunami aid is easy prey for many former combatants in an environment with low legal enforcement—a climate that is reinforced because many affluent aid organizations are under pressure to expeditiously realize goals and thus turn a blind eye on corruption, extortion and bribes in order to secure the smooth implementation of projects. Besides these informal ‘taxes’, fierce and often violent competition for employment, contracts and sales is a symptom of this highly funded aid environment. Many former fighters participating in this race are increasingly comfortable relying on the ‘fast money’ of the development industry (Interviews 320 and 333; Aspinall, 2008).

In accordance with the MoU, the GoI has provided some funds to compensate former rebels and other victims of the conflict. The GoI allocated about \$200 million in total for 2005 to 2007.²⁵ Yet reintegration and conflict recovery in general proved to be a more difficult problem after disarmament and demobilization of former combatants, monitored by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), went relatively smoothly. In 2008, reintegration remained one of the major challenges for the local authorities with regards to sustainable peace in the province.²⁶

Conclusion

The 2004 tsunami was an exceptional opportunity for political collaboration since it created practical grounds for peace, namely the creation of a more stable and safe situation for post-tsunami reconstruction. This, in turn, added to the pre-tsunami political will of both parties to find a solution to the conflict. The tsunami catalysed a pre-arranged peace initiative and internationalized the peace-building process by exposing and publicizing the conflict to a concerned audience that was willing to provide the AMM and a massive international presence.²⁷ For GAM, this ensured a favourable bargaining position as well as greater accountability and commitment to potential agreements with the GoI. In addition, the sympathy and solidarity factors as well as the psychological impact of this catastrophic disaster helped bring about the MoU between GAM and the GoI and consolidated the best chance for durable peace in Aceh since the foundation of GAM.

Economic and social injustices between the national centre (Jakarta and Java) and the provincial periphery (Aceh) fuelled almost three decades of conflict between the GoI and GAM. Since the devastating tsunami of December 2004 catalysed the cessation of these hostilities, new tensions have emerged, this time within Aceh. These tensions are partly the result of aid allocation in response to the dual disasters of tsunami and conflict. Two largely separate ‘aid scapes’ emerged for each of the humanitarian crises, with the attention, expertise and resources allocated for tsunami victims far exceeding those for survivors of the conflict. As a result, more than three years after the tsunami, many conflict victims—including ex-combatants—are still disadvantaged by a lack of health care, access to education and information and, in particular, job skills and opportunities. In contrast, tsunami survivors and

high-ranking members of the former armed groups are largely profiting from Aceh's massive aid industry. Social grievances relating to a lack and mismatch in the allocation of attention, funds and effective assistance have created social and political tensions in Aceh's society. Many ex-combatants and families affected by the end of conflict are frustrated and feel neglected in light of both massive assistance towards the victims of the tsunami and some of 'their own' senior GAM commanders emerging through patronage and acts of 'dishonest behaviour' (Interview 202; Palmer, 2007). The Government of Aceh has the difficult task of addressing conflict-induced underdevelopment in general to reduce social injustices and tensions as well as high levels of violence, crime and related feelings of insecurity and fear in Aceh.

International post-tsunami assistance was crucial for catalysing peace and fostering its continuation. However, since the MoU, a less exclusive approach to post-tsunami recovery and rehabilitation could help to avoid some of the emerging problems by considering the rather similar needs of conflict victims. This study provides evidence that stronger emphasis on the reintegration of conflict-affected communities through improved livelihoods is warranted. Furthermore, greater integration of the two disaster 'aid scapes', in concert with expert consultation on how to proceed, is a priority.

This paper has argued that responses to and resources for the tsunami and for the end of the conflict signalled by the MoU were geographically and operationally separate. A more coordinated approach that combines these distinct aid resources and targets all victims of the dual disasters can still help to avoid the disparities between tsunami survivors and those affected by the end of conflict. Evidence that the tsunami hastened the signing of a peace agreement is clear. How aid agencies, most of which have either tsunami-related or conflict-based mandates, can address the effects of these dual disasters in an integrated manner and in concert with the Government of Aceh remains an open question. Echoing one activist based at a local humanitarian NGO, this research finds that prospects for more justice and for a 'less violent peace' in Aceh rely on the answer:

I assure [you] that if the perspective on the way that aid is delivered changes, I think that peace in Aceh will really be lasting because the people feel that this peace becomes a possession of the people where all get a benefit from this peace, which will then be commonly protected. But, with a continuous perspective on victims which differentiates between conflict victims and tsunami victims, there will always be someone feeling disadvantaged in the current process. And I fear that this causes again jealousy, as it already existed during conflict time (Interview 340).

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Endnotes

- ¹ The MoU stipulated that the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) had to decommission 840 weapons and to demobilize its forces. Indonesia would have to withdraw all police, except those carrying out normal policing activities, as well as the Indonesian Military Forces; grant a general amnesty for GAM prisoners; provide compensation for GAM; compensate the Acehese population for the loss of property and human rights abuses resulting from the conflict; rehabilitate GAM; change legislation to allow for the formation of local political parties; guarantee provincial entitlement up to 70% of revenues from all current and future hydrocarbon deposits and other natural resources; judge all civilian crimes committed by military personnel in civil courts in Aceh; and set up a truth and reconciliation commission. The Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), comprising monitors from the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), would oversee the implementation of the MoU.
- ² The Darul Islam Rebellion was triggered by orthodox Muslims in West Java and South Sulawesi, which demanded the formation of an Islamic State of Indonesia (Van Dijk, 1981). In 1953, the Rebellion was joined by segments of the Acehese political and religious elite, especially as the special status given to Aceh in 1949 was abrogated and the province merged into North Sumatra in 1951 (Dexter, 2004). These developments revealed that dogmatic purity of Islam and ethnic identity may have driven the struggle, but that money, power and distributional justice were its crucial causes.
- ³ This declaration stipulates no linkage at all between religion and the aim to separate Aceh from the Republic of Indonesia (Ross, 2003). There is a general misconception that GAM wants to establish an independent Islamic state of Aceh. This misreading is understandable given that the struggle for an independent Aceh first began as a quest for an Islamic state and that the GoI fomented this perception as a 'propaganda ploy to deviate public opinion from the real issue of the conflict' (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 166). Nevertheless, some splinter groups emerged out of the dissatisfaction with GAM's secular orientation; these include the Front Mujahidin Islam Aceh in 2001 and Republik Islam Aceh (Kassim, 2006).
- ⁴ The transmigration of Javanese to Indonesia's outer islands (*transmigrasi*) was an initiative by the GoI intended to alleviate the problem of population pressure on Java.
- ⁵ The HDC has since been renamed the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, referred to as HD Centre.
- ⁶ Many people were only temporarily displaced and by the time the earthquake and tsunami struck Aceh, the Provincial Government of Aceh reported that only 1,874 people were still officially displaced and living in camps (IOM, 2004). This official figure, however, does not account for displaced people living in exile, or with friends and relatives in 'safer' urban areas (Mahdi, 2006).
- ⁷ See, for example, ASNLF (n.d.); human rights groups such as Koalisi NGO HAM Aceh (n.d.); or the local monthly magazine *Acehkita* (n.d.).
- ⁸ Specifically, both the Wahid and Megawati governments had remained dependent on the TNI to ensure their political survival; the TNI thus had economic incentives in the perpetuation of the conflict. Consequently, the GoI lacked the interest and will to resolve the Aceh issue once and for all (Aguswandi, 2004a); the international community was complacent and HDC was inexperienced in Aceh; local and national civil society became marginalized during these peace talks (Aguswandi,

2004a; Schulze, 2004); GAM and the GoI refused to reexamine their positions (Schulze, 2004); and peace efforts were undermined by suspicion and mistrust (Prasodjo and Hamid, 2005; Aspinall and Crouch, 2003).

- ⁹ As Coordinating Minister of Politics and Security under Megawati, Yudhoyono functioned as the head of the Aceh Desk created in 2001 to consolidate government policies in Aceh. Yudhoyono opposed Megawati's threats to declare a state of emergency and supported an opening up to foreigners, including election monitors, before being ousted (Neuwirth et al., 2006).
- ¹⁰ This is the result of the second round of the elections, a ballot with former President Megawati. Since Yudhoyono received only 24% of the vote in the first round (Mahdi, 2004), support in Aceh mostly reflected a rejection of Megawati (Aguswandi, 2004b).
- ¹¹ See also, Gaillard, Clavé and Kelman (2008).
- ¹² Rather than a totally new initiative, the 2005 negotiations followed on secret talks initiated during the previous year by Jusuf Kalla. After agreements for further talks between GoI and GAM negotiators, Martti Ahtisaari was invited by Kalla and Finnish businessman Juha Christensen to facilitate the negotiations four days before the tsunami struck Aceh (Merikallio, 2005; *Modus*, 2005). A former Finnish President and the Chairman of the Finnish NGO Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), Martti Ahtisaari received the approval of the Sweden-based GAM leadership for mediating and invited the two parties to Helsinki (ICG, 2005a; 2005b; *Tempo*, 2005).
- ¹³ The KPA is the civil organization representing former combatants of GAM's military wing, the National Army of Aceh (Tentara Nasional Aceh, TNA).
- ¹⁴ Muzakkir Manaf—the former top commander of the TNA and now head of both the KPA and the local GAM Party 'Partai Aceh'—is also the CEO and founder of the Pulo Gadeng Group, one of the most important companies and umbrella organizations for business in post-tsunami reconstruction. See Aditjondro (2007).
- ¹⁵ Consequently, two major reintegration-related problems led to confusion, delays and deep frustration among potential beneficiaries. The first was that the number of GAM fighters was grossly underestimated as a strategic move by GAM to conceal the full extent of its support and to minimize the number of weapons they would have to surrender (Renner, 2006). Furthermore, GAM non-combatants (such as logistics and coordination) were not included as part of the beneficiary group for reintegration funds at all. The second was the conscious refusal by the GoI to name the anti-separatist militias as combatant groups to be disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated (Avonius, 2007). Since approximately 15,000 GAM fighters existed at the time the MoU was signed (Interview 101), but in line with the MoU, GoI reintegration funds were allocated for only 3,000, the final share in immediate social security benefits for each combatant was only about one-fifth of what each was officially entitled to receive. Many former GAM non-combatants felt excluded altogether until, after long negotiations, 6,200 of them were included in the BRA beneficiary structure by the end of 2006. As for the TNI-backed militias, they, too, were included in the BRA beneficiary structure in May 2006, leading to the withdrawal of GAM and civil society representatives from the BRA (Schulze, 2007; ICG, 2007).
- ¹⁶ Insecurity and tensions also had other root causes: law enforcement and security sector reform are not well implemented, many illegal weapons are still in circulation and criminal gangs from outside of Aceh have begun operating in the province.
- ¹⁷ They included, inter alia, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, the Indonesian Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, the World Bank, the International Rescue Committee and the Dutch organization Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Zeccola, forthcoming).
- ¹⁸ One interviewee reported that the aid agencies and donor agencies that broadened their target group to also include persons affected by the conflict included—among few others—the International Organization for Migration, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office and Médecins

Sans Frontières. The Canadian International Development Agency, the UN Development Programme, the US Agency for International Development, Caritas, Premier Urgent, Cardi, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and a few others followed later that year. More organizations followed suit in 2007 and 2008.

- ¹⁹ See, for example, the inauguration speech of North Aceh district head Ilyas A. Hamid on 3 March 2007 (Hamid, 2007).
- ²⁰ See also, BRR and Partners (2008). The authors of this study were well aware that they might seem like potential funders of a credit programme; to avoid confusion, they clarified that they were researchers. Still, findings may be skewed if respondents perceived prospects of aid. The fact remains, however, that none of the 14 men had full-time work. The situation of the rank-and-file GAM contrasts sharply with GAM who are in political or economic power.
- ²¹ The number of local conflicts averaged 100 per month in 2007, as compared to less than 20 in the 6 month before and after the signing of the MoU. In 2007, the peak was reached in March, with 140 local conflicts per month (World Bank/DSF, 2007b). Numbers remain high: in April 2008, this peak was reached again with 144 recorded local-level conflicts, and in May and June 2008, new record highs of 149 and 166 local-level conflicts were reported (World Bank/DSF, 2008a; 2008b).
- ²² Reported incidents of these types of crime have generally increased since the signing of the MoU. Compared to the 22-month period preceding the signing of the MoU, the crime rate increased fivefold in the 22-month period after the signing (Serambi, 2008a).
- ²³ Most of the incidents of crime, including robberies, kidnappings and extortion, are concentrated on the eastern coast, particularly in the districts of Aceh Utara and Aceh Timur. From December 2007 to April 2008, for example, 50% of the incidents of violence occurred in these districts, including in the cities of Lhokseumawe and Langsa (World Bank/DSF, 2008a). Both districts have a history of one of the highest levels of GAM–GoI conflict intensity (World Bank, 2007). Aceh Timur is the district with the highest poverty level in Aceh (BRR and Partners, 2008). Tsunami aid did not change this situation, as the coasts in this district were hardly affected by the tsunami disaster (HIC and OCHA, 2005).
- ²⁴ Initially deriving from the Dutch word for ‘free man’ (Ryter, 2000).
- ²⁵ The GoI promised to allocate \$20 million in 2005, \$60 million in 2006 and \$70 million in 2007 to the BRA (ICG, 2007). By August 2007, the BRA had allocated \$150 million to assist targeted groups. By then, it has disbursed IDR 25 million (\$3,500) to each of the 3,000 GAM combatants, IDR 10 million (\$1,400) to each of the 6,200 GAM non-combatants, IDR 10 million (\$1,400) to each of the 2,035 political prisoners, IDR 5 million (\$700) to each of the 3,024 GAM members who surrendered before the MOU was signed and IDR 10 million (\$1,400) to 6,500 members of anti-separatist groups (Rayan, 2007).
- ²⁶ See also, Ahtisaari quoted in *Antara* (2008, p. 1).
- ²⁷ In the month before the tsunami, Vice President Jusuf Kalla made remarks that third-party involvement in the peace process was not welcome by the government; half a year later, the MoU included international monitoring by the AMM, which was established to monitor the implementation of various aspects of the peace agreement set out in the MoU. This included maintaining liaisons and good cooperation with the parties and, in the final period of its mandate from 15 September 2006 to 15 December 2006, also the investigation and rule on complaints and alleged violations of the MoU (AMM, n.d.; Shie, 2004).

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Interviews

- Interview 17: activist working for a local NGO, Banda Aceh, 21 May 2006.
- Interview 25: GAM ex-combatant, Aceh Timur, 25 June 2006.
- Interview 37: academic and peace talks observer, Singapore, 1 June 2006.
- Interview 101: former AMM delegate, Sabang, 3 April 2007.
- Interview 115: field worker for a local NGO, Pidie, 03 May 2007.
- Interview 118: journalist for local media, Lhokseumawe, 17 May 2007.
- Interview 201: former GAM commander, now KPA and BR R, Banda Aceh, 2 June 2007.
- Interview 202: lawyer at a local NGO, Banda Aceh, 2 June 2007.
- Interview 205: livelihoods trainer, Banda Aceh, 3 June 2007.
- Interview 208: former prisoner of war, returned refugee from Europe, Pidie, 4 June 2007.
- Interview 213: head of new political party, former student activist, Banda Aceh, 5 June 2007.
- Interview 308: local woman activist working for the BR R, Banda Aceh, 31 May 2008.
- Interview 320: local ex-contractor, now working for an international NGO, Banda Aceh, 5 June 2008.
- Interview 322: reintegration adviser for an international NGO, Banda Aceh, 6 June 2008.
- Interview 330: international NGO country manager, Banda Aceh, 14 June 2008.
- Interview 333: activist working for a peace-mediating international NGO, Aceh Timur, 21 June 2008.
- Interview 340: humanitarian activist working for a local NGO, Lhokseumawe, 25 June 2008.