

## **Disaster Research Center (DRC)**

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### **Press Release**

The December 26, 2004 earthquake and the tsunamis it generated have already been described as one of the “worst disasters” in recent history. Very few natural disasters in historical times have had such far-flung, catastrophic consequences as the Sumatra Earthquake and the tsunamis it generated across the Indian Ocean. At the Disaster Research Center (DRC), we have been deeply touched by this disaster, the devastation resulting from these events, the still increasing loss of life, and the valiant response and recovery efforts undertaken by the survivors and outside volunteers.

DRC has been asked by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI, based in California) to join a reconnaissance team, funded by the National Science Foundation, which will travel to the affected regions. The Sea Grant College Program at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (UPRM) will also provide partial funding for this reconnaissance trip. The goals of this multidisciplinary team will be to: collect perishable data; identify communities and organizations that were particularly hard hit by these events; observe the extent to which engineered and non-engineered structures were damaged or destroyed by both the earthquake and the tsunamis; observe the methods that were being used to restore lifeline facilities (electrical and water systems) in the emergency period; identify local and state agencies as well as local and international NGO’s that are taking part in the recovery and relief efforts; and make contacts with research centers in the affected nations. This effort will provide the first step in developing long-term collaborative relationships that will contribute to a better understanding of the disaster’s social and physical impacts, the complexities of disaster response and relief across many nations that are coping with similar disaster problems at the same time, and issues that will affect the physical, social and economic recovery of the region in general.

The EERI-DRC social science reconnaissance team will include Havidán Rodríguez (DRC Director), Tricia Wachtendorf (DRC Core Faculty), James Kendra (currently at the University of North Texas and a former post-doctoral fellow at DRC), and Joseph Trainor (graduate student and DRC Project Coordinator). The EERI-DRC team will visit areas in India and Sri Lanka that

were most severely impacted by the recent tsunamis. Among DRC's preliminary reconnaissance interests are: the absence of integrated warning systems in countries around the Indian Ocean; transnational coordination and collaboration in the provision of response assistance; the distribution of disaster relief aid and supplies; disaster vulnerability and the social and economic impact/consequences of the tsunamis in different nations; differences in disaster response and protective action; and the impact of the disaster on children and other vulnerable groups.

DRC was the first social science research center in the world devoted to the study of disasters. During the past 42 years, DRC researchers have conducted nearly 600 field studies, traveling to communities throughout the United States and to a number of foreign countries. DRC researchers have carried out systematic studies on a broad range of disaster types, including hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hazardous chemical incidents, plane crashes, civil disturbances, and terrorist events. EERI is a national, non-profit, technical, and multi-disciplinary institute. EERI seeks to improve our "understanding of the impact of earthquakes on the physical, social, economic, political, and cultural environment" and to advocate for "comprehensive and realistic measures for reducing the harmful impacts of earthquakes." The UPRM Sea Grant College Program is "an educational program devoted to the conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine resources in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Caribbean region." The Program seeks to conduct scientific research in a number of areas, including coastal tourism, hazards, and economic development and apply the scientific knowledge it generates to solve a variety of problems that these communities face on a daily basis. DRC welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with EERI, the UPRM Sea Grant College Program, and with other organizations and agencies in the regions impacted by the earthquake and tsunamis to contribute to a better understanding of the societal impacts and consequences of such devastating events.

For additional information on DRC: <http://www.udel.edu/DRC/>

For additional information on EERI: <http://www.eeri.org>

For additional information on the UPRM Sea Grant College Program:

<http://seagrants.uprm.edu/>