

Tsunami Commemoration

Commemoration Service at St Paul's Cathedral

This speech was delivered on 25 April 2005 by Orapin Dawson on behalf of the Anglo-Thai charity and Maidenhead Interfaith, at the Commemoration Service at St Paul's Cathedral for those lost in the Asian Tsunami in 2004. The audience included Queen Elisabeth II and the Prime Minister Tony Blair, along with several hundred people at the service and watched by many millions of people around the World.

Good afternoon, Ladies & Gentlemen. It is an honour and a privilege for me to share my experience of Tsunami Disaster with you today.

I visited villages in the worst Tsunami effected area , Khao Lak, Phangnga Province 80 km. north of Phuket in March, on behalf of the Anglo-Thai Society and Maidenhead InterFaith Group, to find out if there would be any village that we can adopt to help rebuild their lives.

Even expecting to see devastation, the evidence of such colossal scale of disaster was unimaginable and overwhelming. In the one village alone, three kilometers of housing simply disappeared.

I met number of affected villagers. One villager Mrs Ratree, lost six of her family; daughter, parents, brother, aunt and nephews and her home. She is now living in a tent, which she has to share with three other families. She has no hope of help.

Another traumatic case was a mother, leaving her two daughters, age 9 and 7, having breakfast with her mother to get some gas. She watched as her entire family was swept away by the wave, helpless.

Villagers in Ban Nam Khem are coming to term with the lost of their families, homes and their livelihood. They are trying to rebuild. Having seen their suffering and their positive aptitudes, I feel very humble.

Is there anything we can do to help?

Firstly, I would urge everyone here in the West not to fall into the trap of believing help is no longer needed. It is. People live in tents, with nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Next, I would like to urge the Thai Government to change their policy and consider accepting offers of help from international community.

But we in the West must also honour our pledges of support. It is a tragic state of affairs to promise a lifeline to a drowning person, only to fail to deliver it.

Finally, we need to be aware of the overwhelming love and support bursting from people in Britain so saddened by the enormity of suffering of so many people.

We can make a difference, no matter how little.