

**EXECUTIVE BOARD STATEMENT TO THE
TORONTO & YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2005**



“SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF HUMAN TRAGEDY”

The natural disaster created by the December 26th tsunami in the Indian Ocean has touched people in every corner of the globe. Day after day, images from the shores of a dozen countries tell the story of unprecedented destruction. Towns destroyed, whole populations swept into the sea, and the millions left homeless have sparked a tremendous response from nations rich and poor.

For the labour movement in Canada, and particularly the Toronto area, the tragedy is made more real because so many of our brothers and sisters come from those areas. Our workmates and neighbours have lost families, friends, and sometimes the very places they once called home. Our sympathy goes out to them and their communities in this trying time.

When unions were formed here over a century ago, one of their first roles was raising funds for those who were struck by tragedy. It was seen as the most basic element of solidarity that working people could offer each other. Today, we are faced with an urgent need for international solidarity in the form of aid for those who have nothing left in the wake of one of the worlds largest natural disasters. We urge every union to donate generously to agencies that can deliver relief as soon as possible.

We are mindful that two of the areas that have been hardest hit - Aceh in Indonesia and northern Sri Lanka - have been wracked with years of civil war. Only recently, thousands of Tamil Canadians gathered at Queen's Park to express their desire for peace in their native land. We all hope that the governments of those two countries will co-operate with aid agencies and NGOs to ensure that relief does reach every community in need, and that human rights are respected in the difficult months ahead.

The reconstruction effort will continue long after the headlines disappear from the mainstream media. It will require tremendous resources, as well as a commitment to rebuild social infrastructure. Too often in history the poor have borne the brunt of massive changes flowing from such disasters - the terms and conditions of aid will have a huge impact on the outcome.

Our solidarity must start by addressing the immediate physical needs. It should then seek to ensure that working people are afforded the opportunity to truly rebuild their lives and their communities after this terrible tragedy.

The Executive Board recommends that:

1. The Labour Council extend its sympathy and condolences to all who have lost family or loved ones in this disaster.
2. All unions in the Toronto region be asked to donate generously to aid organizations that can provide relief as quickly as possible.
3. Labour Community Services be asked to work with its volunteers and local unions to assist in raising funds and providing support for union members who have been directly affected.
4. Labour Council work with the CLC and human rights organizations around issues of social justice in the stricken region.