## Conflict Factsheet

**The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 in Aceh, Indonesia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>4</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern Asia</td>
<td>2004 – ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Extreme weather events and disasters</td>
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</tbody>
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**Conflict Summary**

In the decades between the early 1970s and the beginning of the 2000s, the northern Indonesian province of Aceh was exposed to a civil conflict between the central Indonesian government and the rebel movement GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; Free Aceh Movement). As a consequence of a devastating tsunami that hit Aceh in 2004, a peace agreement between the two sides was reached in 2005.
Conflict History

Note: This is a case where a natural disaster contributed to resolving a priorly existing civil war. While a very important case, this does not fit closely into the conceptual model focused on the relationship of environmental change and conflict. For this reason, we do not display a full conceptual model for this case.

Aceh has a population of around four million people of which up to 95% are Islamic-conservative. Thus since 2003, Sharia law officially applies for Aceh. The religious fractionalization within Indonesia was one of the reasons for the escalation of an internal conflict that began in the 1970s with the formation of the GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka – Free Aceh Movement) rebel group and lasted more than three decades, reaching different levels of intensity over time. Differences arose between conservative and moderate Muslims on how to best practice and integrate their religious conviction into daily life. Moreover, Acehnese people feared an increasing migration from Java and other parts of the country and perceived it as a potential threat to their indigenous way of life. Additionally, the Indonesian government was made responsible for discriminating the local population, e.g. by excluding them from resource revenues (AKUF, 2007).

Civil conflict in 1976 and subsequent human rights violations
The civil conflict began in 1976, when the GAM declared the independence of Aceh unilaterally and started its armed fight against the national Indonesian government. This led to a vast increase in human rights violations and conflict deaths, with official statistics pointing to 12,000 to 15,000 people being killed during the violent conflict (Reid 2006). In the first years, the GAM was not successful at all and was almost defeated by the Indonesian military forces at the end of the 1970s. Subsequently, with external support from Libya that was sparked by Muammar Gaddafi’s intention to strengthen separatist movements in their fight against global imperialism and colonialism, the GAM rebels were able to consolidate and withstand further attacks. Till the mid-1990s, they gradually gained approval within the region, especially due to support of the local Acehnese people, who were scared and alienated by the ruthless military action of the Indonesian forces (AKUF, 2007).

Abolition of President Suharto in 1998
In 1998, the dictatorship of President Suharto was abolished by the ruling elite due to political and economic dissatisfaction. When Indonesia started its democratization process, Aceh was given greater autonomy. Nevertheless, the insurgents perceived the political concessions as insufficient and refused them immediately. Thus, the initial hope to reach a peace agreement between the opposing parties was not fulfilled and armed clashes intensified again (AKUF, 2007).

Situation after the first democratic elections in 2001
After the first democratic elections in 2001, the new President Sukarnoputri intended to strengthen the central government’s legitimacy by negotiating an agreement with the separatist movements. To this end, she signalled to cooperate with those groups and make concessions, e.g. by giving them more autonomy rights to deescalate the on-going civil conflict and consolidate the Indonesian state. However, the GAM was not willing to accept this offer, because they already controlled several parts of Aceh and were trying to further broaden their influence in the region.
Although a fragile peace agreement could be reached in 2002, the implementation did not meet the expectations. For example, the disarming of the insurgents as well as the withdrawal of government troops did not happen as agreed. Confronted with this negative outcome, President Megawati decided to pass martial law for the province of Aceh and proclaimed the state of emergency, leading to a deteriorating humanitarian situation (Human Rights Watch, 2003). On this basis, the Indonesian armed forces conducted one of their largest military interventions in the region, with 40,000 soldiers and 12,000 policemen being involved (Tapol, 2004). As a result, 125,000 people had to migrate internally (IOM, 2004) and more than 2,000 people were killed (Enia, 2008). During this government offensive, which lasted two years, the GAM lost nearly half of its military capacities, but was still willing and able to continue its fight for an independent Aceh.

Resolution Efforts

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had a direct impact on two thirds of the Acehnese people. More than 167,000 people died and 500,000 had to migrate due to this devastating natural disaster (TEC, 2006).

Governmental response to the 2004 Tsunami

Although the tsunami almost exclusively hit Aceh, the Indonesian President saw this a chance to foster the country’s unity and declared: „I call on those who are still fighting, to come out ... [and] let us use this historic moment to join and be united again“ (Siboro, 2004). The GAM was, compared to the rest of the local population, less affected by the disaster, because they traditionally hid in the remote and mountainous area of northern Aceh. This made them one of the first agents to provide humanitarian aid, combined with the intention to raise its legitimacy. Afraid of losing influence in this contested region, the Indonesian government decided to react quickly and send own troops for disaster relief operations (Nakashima, 2005; Huxley, 2005). This predictable confrontation led to a further escalation of the conflict that severely increased the number of casualty for the GAM (Powell, 2005).

Peace treaty and subsequent ceasefire

In the end, several factors were decisive to reach a comprehensive peace treaty between both parties. Following the tsunami, the devastating situation in Aceh made it even harder for the GAM to operate in the region and withstand the pressure by the military forces. Therefore, the GAM unilaterally declared its willingness to negotiate a peace agreement. On the other hand, the Indonesian President Yudhoyono followed a pragmatic and moderate course, taking the concerns of the GAM seriously and leading the way to a ceasefire (Enia, 2008).

Additionally, international attention focused on humanitarian relief operations in the region, putting pressure on both sides to stop fighting and prioritise reconstruction efforts. However, there is no consensus yet, whether the peace negotiations mediated by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari recommenced due to the disaster’s impact (Aspinall, 2005) or if there was no significant effect, because the peace process did already start before the tsunami hit the country (Weizenegger, 2007).

During the negotiations, the GAM gave up their secession claims and was promised greater autonomy, self-government and the foundation of an own regional party (Donnan and Bergstrom, 2005). Furthermore, it was agreed that the local population of Aceh should receive 70% of the revenues of resources exploited
in the region. Therefore, the rebels agreed to disarm and demobilise completely. Finally, it was agreed to monitor the implementation by the EU and ASEAN states. In 2005, the Memorandum of Understanding entered into force and the Indonesian parliament recognised Aceh’s autonomy status.

**Summary**
The case study on Aceh yields further insights when comparing it with the conflict case of Sri Lanka. Both countries experienced a civil war lasting over several decades and both were hit by the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004. Despite these structural similarities, the developments and outcome in the aftermath of the disaster were quite different. While a peace agreement was signed in Aceh, violence escalated in Sri Lanka and the conflict was finally determined by the defeat of the rebel movement after four more years of fighting.

### Intensities & Influences

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<tr>
<td><strong>INTENSITIES</strong></td>
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<td>International / Geopolitical Intensity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INFLUENCES</strong></td>
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<td>Environmental Influences</td>
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<td>Societal Influences</td>
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#### Violent Conflict
- **Yes**

#### Salience with nation
- **National**

#### Mass displacement
- **More than 100,000 or more than 10% of the country’s population are displaced within the country.**

#### Cross Border Mass Displacement
- **No**

### Resolution Success

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<tr>
<td><strong>Reduction in Violence</strong></td>
<td>Violence has ceded completely.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resolve of displacement problems</strong></td>
<td>There is some success in accommodating the displaced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reduction in geographical scope</strong></td>
<td>The geographical scope of the conflict has decreased.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Increased capacity to address grievance in the future</strong></td>
<td>The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grievance Resolution</strong></td>
<td>Grievances have been mostly addressed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity</strong></td>
<td>Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.</td>
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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Dialogue
In the aftermath of the tsunami, the GAM declared its willingness to negotiate a peace agreement, which was received by the Indonesian government by taking the concerns of the rebel group into serious consideration, leading the way towards a ceasefire.

Humanitarian & Development aid
Both the Indonesian government and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) rebel group prioritized the provision of humanitarian aid for the Aceh province affected by the devastating tsunami.

Changes in constitutional balance of power
In 2005, the Indonesian parliament officially recognized Aceh’s autonomy status after negotiations with the GAM.

Resources and Materials

Conflict References
The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 in Sri Lanka

References with URL

References without URL