

# Year of Promise Ends With Asia Pacific Community United in Hope

By

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Two enormous tragedies in the early years of this century demonstrate the continuing importance of the work of the East-West Center. The first was the terrorist attack on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and the second was the December 26, 2004 earthquake and tsunami in South and Southeast Asia. As reported in the Center's annual report for 2001, the terrorist attack "etched into our collective memories the value of our civilization, the dangers of taking it for granted, and the need for sustained cooperation and solidarity in addressing mankind's most difficult challenges." The 2004 tsunami was the single most widespread, catastrophic natural disaster in the Asia Pacific region since the East-West Center was created, and it was especially painful for our community. Many of our students and alumni come from countries hard hit by the disaster. One of our students from Aceh lost more than 100 relatives.

Both tragedies were followed by an outpouring of world sympathy

and support for the innocent victims. In 2001, many of our alumni and supporters wrote heartening messages of sympathy and condolence to the East-West Center as an American organization. In the case of the tsunami, the East-West Center responded immediately by establishing a tsunami relief fund. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of those who contributed money and time to relief efforts, not only from citizens and corporations in Hawai'i but also from alumni and institutions associated with the Center throughout the United States. We were particularly touched by the contributions of elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. and our alumni chapters abroad. The funds are being distributed to worthy organizations operating in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Indonesia.

As heartening and important as are the immediate human responses to tragedy, they must be complemented by long-term efforts to address underlying issues. This is where

*In the aftermath of the tsunami, little remained of coastal communities throughout the Indian Ocean region.*



Photo: Marco Garcia



*Roland Lagareta,  
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institutions with longer-term research and education programs, like the East-West Center, have a central role. The terrorist attacks underscored the need for intensified efforts to reach out to Asian Muslim countries and participants and to address the weaknesses of educational systems that foster intolerance and justify harm to others. In 2001, the East-West Center began its Muslim and educational policy initiatives. In response to the recent disaster in the Indian Ocean region, the East-West Center and the EWC-managed Pacific Disaster Center have initiated a number of activities that will be important in rebuilding devastated areas, reducing future risks and vulnerability, training disaster managers, and addressing weaknesses in international response mechanisms.

The past year has been a very full one. The Center's Board of Governors and management worked on a new strategic plan, meeting with many stakeholder groups including members of Congress, administration officials, representatives from business and education, and other individuals and organizations that support the Center. More than 700 East-West Center alumni responded to a questionnaire asking about their vision of the Center, and the alumni, Board and management participated in working sessions on aspects of the strategic plan at the August 2004 international alumni meeting in Tokyo. These meetings

have reaffirmed the strong attachments and expectations that all stakeholders have in the East-West Center and have helped provide us with a set of strategic goals. It was clear that our stakeholders expect the Center to provide education and to continue to organize cooperative research programs addressing mutual concerns. Other significant goals are to strengthen regional organizations, reduce conflicts, and help prepare Americans for an era in which Asia and the Pacific is even more important to their lives.

During 2004, there were 364 students from 43 countries at the East-West Center, a significant increase over the 107 students five years ago. Students play leading roles in many aspects of East-West Center life, including conducting the orientation of new students, putting on cultural performances (such as the East-West Fest), and organizing the international Graduate Student Conference. Students were also instrumental in organizing the tsunami relief concert, which involved dozens of performers and took place only one week after the disaster.

Students and other participants at the East-West Center are our future, and the Center is blessed to have a huge network of dedicated alumni. The Tokyo International Alumni Conference attracted nearly 400 alumni from 25 countries, and resulted in a plan to have a South

Asian regional alumni conference in New Delhi in November 2005. Our Vietnam chapter is working hard on the international conference in Hanoi in 2006.

Under the leadership of Muthiah Alagappa, East-West Center Washington continues to grow. The Center sponsored an internal security conflict research project that examined five areas of tension in East and Southeast Asia including Aceh, Papua, southern Philippines, Xinjiang and Tibet and generated a number of policy studies and recommendations. East-West Center Washington also hosts the U.S. Asia Pacific Council, which held its second meeting in November 2004.

We are grateful to the dedicated help of the many friends of the East-West Center as well as our staff, participants, alumni, and members of the Board of Governors and East-West Center Foundation Board. We believe that the Center's mission in support of Asia Pacific relations is as vital today as it was at the institution's inception 45 years ago.

Perhaps even more so. As the Center's response to two pivotal events in this young century has demonstrated, its capacity to bring together under one roof the members of a diverse and dynamic region has strengthened immeasurably the bonds of friendship between the United States and its neighbors in the East.