

## **mobilized for relief**

February 2005

*WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, THE WORLD MOBILIZES. AND SO IT was that hours after a deadly tsunami hit the shores of Sri Lanka, Indonesia and other countries along the Indian Ocean in late December, governments, aid agencies and private donors swung into action, assembling emergency supplies for the victims. Within days, airplanes began swooping into the affected region. Some were packed with food, water, blankets and medical supplies; others carried search and rescue teams, relief workers, medical personnel ... and logisticians.*

*Logisticians? Yes, logisticians. Within 36 hours of the disaster, volunteers from the Airport Emergency Team (AET) were on the ground in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where they got to work directing the unloading of aircraft and organizing the temporary storage of supplies until relief agencies could collect them for distribution. The logisticians, all volunteers on loan to the Disaster Relief Network (DRN) from corporations like DHL Worldwide, TNT Logistics, Aramex and DNATA, worked to ensure a quick turnaround for the aircraft and to keep parts of the airfield clear for routine operations. Under the team's direction, 150 local volunteers have moved over four million pounds of supplies through the airport.*

*The idea behind sending the volunteers was to prevent the kind of airport logjam that has blocked disaster relief efforts in the past. Sri Lanka has only one international airport, which normally handles*

*about 17 flights a day, fewer than half carrying cargo. As activity ramped up to as many as 10 or 15 cargo flights a day, the airport was in danger of becoming a choke-point in the operations.*

*In fact, that's exactly what happened in Iran in December 2003. After a serious earthquake shook the country, nearly 2,000 flights descended on a small regional airport in Bamm that was accustomed to handling only five to six flights per day. Soon supplies had piled up on the runways, hampering efforts to unload the aircraft. "It was almost impossible to get supplies through the airport because they didn't have the people trained to manage the cargo," says Bob Bellhouse, executive director of the DRN. "We resolved to find a structural remedy for that problem."*

*That remedy was creation of Airport Emergency Teams, which the Disaster Relief Network formed just last year. Original plans called for each team to prepare to handle an emergency within a 50-mile radius. No one dreamed that the groups' first mission would turn out to be one of this scale. But shortly after the tsunami hit on Dec. 26, the first Airport Emergency Team got a call from the United Nations Joint Logistics Center to coordinate relief efforts at the airport in Sri Lanka.*

*Despite all its advance planning efforts, the team still encountered obstacles, reports Chris Weeks, the team's leader. "Our biggest problem wasn't getting here, but overcom-*

*ing the initial reservations of the Sri Lankan airforce about ceding control of airport operations to an outside group," he says. "The U.N. helped us address their security concerns and now we're moving flights of relief supplies through the Colombo airport on a daily basis."*

*A second team wasn't so lucky. Two days after the first AET team was dispatched, the U.N. requested that a second AET team take over operations at the Bandar Aceh airport in Indonesia. That group arrived at Bandar Aceh on Dec. 30 but left soon thereafter when the Indonesian government wouldn't cooperate with the relief effort.*

*What lies ahead*  
*Now that supplies are getting to where they're needed, relief agencies are starting to focus on the longer term, something the DRN will also address, especially when it comes to the damage done to the region's economy. "We will convene international business leaders to look beyond emergency life-saving activities to strategies for rebuilding livelihoods," says Bellhouse. "The business sector has a key role to play in the region's economic recovery process and in developing collaborations with governments and non-government organizations to minimize the human and economic costs of future disasters."*

*Also looking for ways to provide long-term help is the Fritz Institute, which is working to identify private-public partnerships to facilitate the delivery of relief services in India,*

*Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The International Federation of Red Cross Societies is using Fritz Institute's humanitarian logistics software to coordinate relief efforts in six countries.*

*Management from the Fritz Institute hopes to use what it's learned this time around to prepare for the next disaster. "We are documenting the lessons learned and the knowledge around what went right and what went wrong in this effort because that is very vital information for future relief efforts," says Anisya Thomas, managing director for the*

*Fritz Institute. When the Fritz Institute holds its annual convention in Geneva in May, the organizations deployed in the relief process will meet to discuss how future relief processes can be improved.*

*Other companies stepping in to lend a hand include Raymond Corp. and Symbol Technologies. Last month, Raymond Corp. said it would donate up to \$200 for every truck sold in January and February. Based on sales projections, the humanitarian gesture, in cooperation with its dealers and distributors, could result in a donation to*

*the Presidents Relief Fund of up to \$300,000.*

*Symbol has pledged \$150,000 in aid to the American Red Cross, Mercy Corps and the United Nations Children's Fund to help with the humanitarian relief effort. Symbol's 6,000 global employees responded with their own contributions to the Symbol Disaster Relief Fund. Employees in India, for example, pledged to donate one day's pay to assist in this aid effort.*