

## The tsunami onslaught

By Dr. Abdul-Majeed Azad

About a month ago as the night of Christmas was winding down in our part of the world, a ferocious calamity made its dawn on the other side of the globe. The earthquake that measured 9.5 on Richter scale combined with the powerful tsunamis has so far killed more than 150,000 in the coastal regions of as many as 11 countries from Sumatra to Somalia. Several thousands are still missing and possibly will never be found — dead or alive. Millions are displaced in the affected countries. It will be impossible to erase from our imagination the telltale streaks of this disaster of biblical proportion, thanks to the crystal-clear digital imaging and Internet blogging. It has robbed the dear ones in thousands of families, while decimating the entire family in many cases. No words or deeds can lessen the pain of the survivors. Lively beaches and resorts filled with joyous tourists became deathbeds within minutes in the coastal regions of Thailand and Sri Lanka, while the poor residents in Sumatra and India were taken by surprise. The comparative satellite imagery before and after of Banda Aceh province in Indonesia, which bore the brunt of both the quake and the tsunamis, tells the grim story without a word being uttered. After his aerial tour of Banda Aceh, Colin Powell commented, "I've never seen anything like this." None of us have. And like President Bush said, "The carnage is of a scale that defies comprehension." Verily it has slaughtered

a population that was truly global.

Hence, the loss is global and so is the pain. A lot will be written and told about this horrifying event all around the world for generations to come. This tragedy has not only touched life but also turned it upside down for the people in its path. Several millions are displaced in the affected countries. As the harrowing stories of the survivors are coming to the fore, most of them will have to live with permanent physical, emotional and psychological scars for the rest of their life. And what life would it be: A life fraught with the image of loved ones being snatched and devoured by the oncoming killer waves? Or an existence filled with sleeplessness? Or the one haunted by the recurring nightmares in which many of them had to make split-second decisions to choose either between their spouse and child or one child among several? How will the survivors cope with the tragedy and make peace with their losses? How will parents find closure with their children gone? Most importantly, who will care for and rear the kids who have nobody left to comfort them? UNICEF and WHO predict that in the long run, both the surviving adults and the children in large numbers will become ineffective components of their communities.

The world — nations and individuals alike — has responded to this tragedy with an emotion that is unprecedented in human history. The enormity of this global

tragedy has propelled three U.S. presidents to the front exhorting all Americans to be generous and compassionate in helping the victims rebuild their ravaged lives. As of Jan. 14, a staggering amount of \$4 billion has been pledged and relief is already on the ground in the affected areas and reaching the needy. This tells us something, doesn't it? It tells us that human beings are not that very different from one another even though we are thousands of miles away from the epicenter of the disaster and the victims. We oft-hear: Our body hues are only skin-deep and our languages are only tongue-deep. Yes, we are not that very different from one another and yet we insist on magnifying our differences to justify wars or support them, propagate and maintain chaos, encourage corruption both on social and political levels, and legitimize usurpation and occupation if it serves our purpose.

The world will never tire of complaining and, surely for good reasons, that the tsunami did this and did that. Yes, undisputedly it has destroyed properties worth billions of dollars and killed innocents by scores of thousands. Yes, it has displaced people by millions and injured and orphaned in numbers we will not know for sure for several months. Amidst all this, however, something strikingly tall and clear (though not very loud to many of us) stands out. This tragedy has made a bold statement to every one of us, irrespective of who we

are, where we are, and whether we were touched by it or spared its wrath. People will keep on debating the "hand-of-God" in it or be satisfied by calling it simply an act of angry Mother Nature. Still some of us would marvel at the geocentric explanation of shifting massive blades of water waves under the sea. Irrespective of how we come to terms with this tragedy and its aftermath, looking at hundreds of those vivid pictures on the Internet, one thing that hits me most is the grim reminder of man's sheer nothingness in the face of nature's manifestation of its sudden and latent might. We never tire of sowing the seeds of pride on the front porch or nursing and nurturing the prejudice in the backyard of our lives. Ironically, we don't stop there. We nourish these prized trees with the best of our ability and capability — at times at the cost of everything that is good, everything that is noble. For those who perished in this tragedy, everything was gone in the blink of an eye but they would never know. Many who were in the tsunami's path have survived but have daunting challenges in front of them to start all over again. But if you think about it, the real survivors are those who were not at all touched by it — us. We all have been given a second chance to look at life and its materialism afresh. After all, every tragedy in retrospective is a reflection of who we are.

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## Reaching out



President Dan Johnson, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Louis Escobar, interim coordinator of the Multicultural Student Center and president of Toledo City Council, and Dr. Alan Goodridge, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs and enrollment services, joined hands at the MLK Unity Celebration last week in Savage Hall as the Toledo Interfaith Mass Choir, right,



sang "Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand." Some 3,000 attended the event, which pays tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The celebration was sponsored by UT and the City of Toledo Board of Community Relations.