

After the Tsunami

U of T ponders role in relief effort

**Top academics brainstorm ways to help after catastrophes
University seeks to influence policy, extend its global reach**

ANDREW CHUNG
STAFF REPORTER

The University of Toronto wants to usher in a new global era on campus by helping to rehabilitate nations devastated by the tsunami and other disasters.

At the same time, it wants to become a more forceful voice influencing local and federal government policy.

The thinking is that the university can position itself to make contributions to other causes and disasters, such as global environmental action,

global poverty and AIDS in Africa, said Patricia McCarney, the university's associate vice-president of international research and development.

"It hasn't been the role of the university to take these responsibilities on in the past," McCarney said.

"But maybe that time has come.

"The U of T," she added, "can become a leader in Canada influencing provincial and federal policies in the near future."

The U of T, being Canada's largest university, is a giant de-

centralized institution, so coordinating any kind of response to disaster is fraught with difficulties.

McCarney organized a meeting last Friday of most of the top leaders at the school as well as some of its most distinguished professors and deans to brainstorm how the U of T can provide long-term support to tsunami-affected countries.

Engineering experts talked about using low-cost satellites in early-warning systems.

Physicians talked about disease and epidemiology.

Psychiatrists talked about helping children with post-traumatic stress.

Two more events will take place: a town hall meeting with students and a round-table discussion with government officials and aid organizations, that will identify how university experts can contribute to humanitarian assistance.

The tsunami killed between 160,000 and 178,000 people, including seven Canadians. As many as 142,000 are still missing. Fourteen Canadians are listed as missing while a dozen are unaccounted for.

Since the disaster, professors and deans alike have expressed their exasperation at feeling dis-

connected from the international community and declared their willingness to put their expertise to good use.

Anthropology professor Joshua Barker advocated partnering with universities in the devastated regions, such as in hard-hit Aceh province in Indonesia, to ensure experts here have the facts they need to help, and to support students from Aceh to study at U of T.

Dean of law Ron Daniels reminded his peers that the U of T is not an aid organization, but that its students are anxious to help.

Some law students, for instance, want to rebuild a school in the devastated region but

aren't sure how to get there. "We have to think of ways to channel that energy," he said.

David Etkin of the Institute for Environmental Studies said the U of T should implement an academic program in disaster studies.

Etkin noted that in disasters the death and destruction is often great because of where people choose to live, such as on flood planes or fault lines. In addition, he said, an emphasis on technology in response to disasters has not worked.

"We can try to relate this to policy," Etkin explained. "Research helps us understand what makes good policy or bad policy."