Ten years on, Caritas Australia remembers and acknowledges the remarkable public support that transformed communities across India, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

In what the former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, described as “an unprecedented global catastrophe”, the Boxing Day tsunami killed over 250,000 people and displaced millions more. It destroyed houses, roads, bridges, schools, marketplaces and livelihoods, prompting the largest humanitarian fundraising appeal and emergency response ever recorded.

Although the earthquake’s epicentre lay just off the coast of Aceh – on the Indonesian island of Sumatra – the subsequent tsunami devastated coastal communities in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, the Maldives, Myanmar, Malaysia, and even affected parts of Africa.
BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE HEADLINES

The international Caritas confederation was one of the largest non-government agencies to respond to the crisis. A total of US$485 million was raised by the Caritas network to fund immediate relief and long-term recovery.

True to the motto ‘before, during and after the headlines’, within hours of the disaster, Caritas launched a response, and today, continues to accompany tsunami-affected communities in their long-term development.

The Asian tsunami appeal was the largest fundraising appeal in Caritas Australia’s history. Together with $3.65 million from the Australian Government, Australians generously contributed almost $25 million towards the relief effort.

This marked a turning point in our engagement with the Australian public. Ten years on, your prayers and generosity remain a testament to our Caritas community’s steadfast commitment to stand in solidarity with the children, women and men most vulnerable to poverty.

AT A GLANCE

The Caritas network:

- Provided one million people with emergency assistance.
- Built over 12,000 temporary and almost 33,000 permanent shelters.
- Assisted with livelihood asset replacement (such as fishing boats) and vocational training to 55,000 households in India and Sri Lanka, and 31,000 people in Indonesia.
- Offered psychosocial support to over 700,000 people in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.
- Completed 350 infrastructure projects such as schools, clinics, roads and markets in Indonesia.

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY

In early December 2014, Caritas organisations from India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand joined confederation members from around the world, Church and other religious leaders to remember victims of the 2004 Asian tsunami.

“Ten years have passed since the tsunami” said Caritas India’s Babita Alick. “And thousands are still living in emotional turmoil. Remembering the destructive power of the tsunami, we remember those who lost lives.”

The delegates joined local Sri Lankan communities in prayer as they looked towards the future.

“I felt honoured to join the commemoration and represent Caritas Australia and the Australian Catholic community,” said Caritas Australia CEO, Paul O’Callaghan. “It was an emotional tribute filled with humanity and hope.”

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the Papal Nuncio to Indonesia during the tsunami said, “The whole world became one people irrespective of national borders, of colour, or religion, to show their closeness to the hundreds of thousands of people who had suffered.”

Within hours of the disaster, Caritas launched a response, and today, continues to accompany tsunami-affected communities in their long-term development.