POST TSUNAMI PLANNING RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT SRI LANKA

Project Office Now Open!

Located in a primarily residential area near Pelawatta Junction in the Parliament area of Colombo is our three storey office and residence for volunteers working and visiting Colombo. As the photos show it is a new building with offices on the ground floor along with French doors leading onto a verandah, balconies at levels one and two, tiled floors, timber framed windows with shutters. June 1st 2006 was the formal opening of the project office and guests were welcomed by Sri Lankan drummers and Board members from the Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka. Senior officers from the National Physical Planning Department and the Urban Development Authority and members of the Institute of Town Planners Sri Lanka were also present and from PIA, Gary Shiels, President of the International Division, Di Jay, CEO and project staff Hemantha Jayasundera and Stephanie Knox. The Australian High Commissioner Dr Gregory French cut the ribbon and declared the office open. A traditional Sri Lankan ceremony, the lighting of the oil lamp followed when all dignitaries light a candle on the lamp. There were several speeches including the ITPSL President K D Fernando, the High Commissioner, Di Jay, Gary Shiels and Hemantha Jayasundera. Guests then inspected the premises and enjoyed morning tea.

Our visit to Sri Lanka was a great opportunity to meet with our project partners including ITPSL, AusAID and Red Cross as well as work through project matters such as lease agreement, bank accounts. There was a meeting of the Project Co-ordination Committee, chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Urban Development and water Supply, Mr A N R Amarathunga. Key matters discussed at this meeting were security, town selection, base mapping and approval of plans. Hambantota was agreed as the project site, meeting the agreed criteria for site selection.

Beyond Colombo
The PIA team visited Kandy, a beautiful hill town about 4 hours drive from Colombo. The traffic was heavy despite our early start and the roadside development almost continuous. We soon realised that a horn is an essential component of any vehicle as we manoeuvred our way amongst the trucks, buses, three wheelers (tuk tuks), motorbikes, push bikes and pedestrians. Our plans to return by train did not eventuate because there were no seats available on the Sunday afternoon train! In Kandy we were hosted by the Deputy Director General of the Urban Development Authority for the eastern region, Mrs Janakie Hettiarachchie. Kandy is a world heritage city with buildings and places that express authentic architecture of different periods. A visit to the Temple of the Tooth and a walk around the lake were highlights of our visit. Janakie showed us an interesting planning case study, a car park project funded by the Asian Development Bank to provide car parking and alleviate some of the congestion in the city centre. Unfortunately the multi storey car park is now something of a white elephant. Parking fees in the car park were meant to be cheaper than on street parking but facing pressure from local businesses, the local politicians did not implement the agreed parking fee structure. As a result it costs money to park in the car park compared to free parking on the street and the streets remain congested and the air polluted with fumes from vehicles (the levels of which are monitored and displayed).
Our visit to Hambantota on the south coast was led by Mrs Indu Weerasoori, Urban Development Authority Director for the Southern Region. We travelled via Bentota, Galle and Matara, and saw a small proportion of the Sri Lankan coastline affected by the tsunami (70% of the coast was damaged by the Boxing Day tsunami). Although much has been repaired we saw rail lines arching in to the air, former fishing boats marooned on high ground, shells of dwellings and remnants of concrete foundations. At Galle, we visit another world heritage site, Galle Fort with its huge bastions that survived intact (the narrow streets and heritage buildings inside the fort also survived the force of the tsunami) but funnelling the waves through the cricket ground to the market, bus terminal and which were thronging with people on a weekend. We all can recall the shocking images of Galle flashing across our television screens in late December 2004.

Beyond Matara are Tangalle and Hambantota which will be the focus of the project’s first planning efforts. Australian volunteer planners will work here with Urban Development Authority Planners on strategic and economic planning and development, coastal planning and urban design tasks. Tangalle is a small coastal town located on a beautiful stretch of coastline and the area between Tangalle and Hambantota (45 kilometres from Tangalle) marks the transition between Sri Lanka’s wet and dry zones. Hambantota is a fishing port and a centre for salt production. Around Hambantota are a number of new housing areas built following the tsunami and we visited some of these developing areas.

Stop press!
Our first team of planners will be arriving in Sri Lanka in early September. The team comprises Wendy Downes from the Office of Urban Management, Brisbane, Mary Hoffman from the City of Melbourne, Sam Kernaghan from Parsons Brinkerhoff, Sydney and Liz Patterson from Connell Wager, Melbourne. Steve Dunn from the City of Knox (Melbourne) and John Tagliaferri from Adelaide will join the team in October.

Enquiries
If you are interested in volunteering to work in Sri Lanka or would like more information about the project please go to www.planning.org.au or contact Stephanie Knox on 03 9347 1900 or email sknox@planning.org.au

Stephanie Knox
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PIA Post Tsunami Planning Project Sri Lanka

Photographs
1. Project office, Colombo
2. Office opening ceremony – Australian High Commissioner Dr Greg French cuts the ribbon
3. Kandy car park
4. Team of planners going to Sri Lanka – Sam Kernaghan, Steve Dunn, Liz Patterson, Wendy Downes, Mary Hoffman (John Tagliaferri absent)