

News Release

Australian NGO to Assist Indonesian Government in Mud Volcano Disaster

Humanitus Sidoarjo Fund Launched for Scientific Research

Melbourne, 19 May 2010 – Australian based NGO Humanitus Foundation has announced the formation of a co-operative working agreement with BPLS, the Indonesian Government Agency tasked to manage the ongoing disaster created by an erupting mud volcano in Sidoarjo, East Java. Since its sudden eruption on May 29, 2006, the mud volcano has inundated villages, destroyed key infrastructure and displaced over 40,000 residents.

The announcement of the launch of the Humanitus Sidoarjo Fund (HSF) follows visits to the disaster-affected area to assess the situation and meet with BPLS officials.

Humanitus Foundation, a non-political, non-religious NGO has a history of achievements working on a range of projects in East Africa and South East Asia.

“Our meetings with BPLS in Indonesia have resulted in the formation of this co-operative working partnership,” said Humanitus Executive Director Jeffrey Richards.

“In essence we are establishing an international fund that aims to support scientific research into the study of the subsurface so that effective infrastructure and social planning can be developed to assist the Indonesian people.”

In consultation with BPLS, Humanitus will also assess the social impact of the mud volcano. This is to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of efforts implemented over the past 4 years and assess the broader implications of this disaster as it continues to advance. Through this comprehensive social impact study Humanitus will assist BPLS in enhancing programs for the direct benefit of the affected communities.

Saturday, May 29 will mark the fourth anniversary of the world’s fastest growing mud volcano. Known as LUSI (a contraction of the Indonesian word for mud (lumpur) and the East Java town near which LUSI was born (Sidoarjo), this phenomenon has been a unique disaster. According to geological experts, the mud eruption could continue unabated for some 35-50 years. Entire townships and farming communities have been buried under meters of mud. To date the mud flow covers an area of some 700 hectares.

The potential for further loss and destruction of thousands more homes and livelihoods is a reality and of paramount concern to the people of the area and all those involved in the management of this mud volcano.

The cloud of controversy that has been hanging over LUSI these past years has ensured that affected communities held little hope of receiving much needed international aid as is usually the case in disaster situations in Indonesia.

“Now is the time to move on from all of the finger pointing and cease dwelling on the cause of this disaster. It is crucial that investigations begin into the long term environmental effects and social impact of this disaster” said Richards.

“A belief that is shared by me and my peers is the fact that until this geological phenomenon is better understood only then can long term social development and infrastructure programs be effectively implemented”

With hot mud pouring into the affected area at an alarming rate, and with no end in sight, this unprecedented disaster worsens by the day. The world is witnessing the birth of an extremely powerful mud volcano and the slow death of a way of life in a region of one of the world’s most populous and eruptive nations.

“We are in the process of identifying key opportunities and partnerships so that scientists, innovators, networks and resources can connect. HSF is actively promoting innovations for the study of this disaster through knowledge sharing, partnerships, and collaborative agreements and funding. With our open approach to identifying and fostering innovations we can be certain of our ability to deliver on our core mission,” said Humanitus SE Asia Director Angus Carnegie.

Scientifically, little is known about LUSI, or the future impact it will have on the region. It is therefore absolutely essential for major funding to be committed for research into this unique disaster. The study of volcanoes is a relatively young science requiring the observation of active eruptions. Scientists involved in the future study of LUSI will be in a unique position to advance their knowledge and hopefully better interpret future disasters of this nature.

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