

**TSUNAMI AFTERMATH** MANAGING DEAD, MISSING

# Disaster workshop opens

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The first international workshop on management of the dead and missing in disasters opened in Bangkok yesterday — in a response to the Dec 26 tsunami of last year.

Organised by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), the five-day workshop will have about 30 participants from 10 Asian countries, many of them senior health professionals and people involved in policy formulation.

Workshop director Marcel Dubouloz said discussions would include lessons learned from the tsunami, disaster preparedness and management procedures for dealing with the dead and missing.

Dealing with widespread fears that corpses could pose an urgent health threat or lead to epidemics in the aftermath of a disaster was also on the agenda.

Mr Dubouloz said although dead bodies could cause epidemics, the risk was very low and manageable. This would occur only under very specific conditions.

The burden was on health authorities to clearly explain this to people.

The effective management, or the mismanagement, of dead and missing foreign nationals could have a strong impact on the economy of the country concerned, especially tourism, he said, and post-tsunami experience showed these issues needed to be addressed urgently.

In Thailand's case, one month after the tsunami there were more than 4,000 unidentified bodies of dead foreigners and more than 3,000 missing. There was also tension between foreign victim-identification teams, which handled all the bodies, and Thai authorities over the return of Thai corpses to local authorities.

He hoped the workshop would strengthen national capacity in disaster management. Participating countries had agreed to set up a joint task force and establish an international network to share experiences and facilitate cooperation.

"The main challenge at the country level is how to promote cooperation between different key players, including police, the army, forensic experts and officials from the Interior and the Foreign Affairs ministries. They must work as partners, not competitors," he said.