



The then Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands Sir Allan Kamekeza presented the government's cheque for \$SI500,000 to the Solomon Island Tsunami Committee. Rotarian Bruce Saunders is standing behind Sir Allan.

Good turn is returned

The small nation of Solomon Islands has been in the news as receiving assistance from Australia and New Zealand, its larger neighbours.

Through the joint efforts of the three countries the people of Solomon Islands had peace and security restored to their nation.

So when news of the devastation caused by the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami reached the Solomons many people there felt moved to do something to help in some way.

The then Prime Minister Sir Allan Kamekeza appointed a committee under his patronage and on behalf of the Solomon Islands Government pledged \$SI500,000.

He then challenged the public to match the initial pledge and people responded magnificently.

Deeply touched by the extent of the tragedy, they gave generously, raising money through radio publicity which included a telethon and other promotional programs.

When the campaign ended, the funds raised had almost reached their target and it was time to decide how to channel the gift in a meaningful way.

An initial approach to one of the large aid organisations proved unsatisfactory. The money would go into an already

huge basket and there was no way of tracking how it would be spent.

Believing that the givers deserved to know that their gifts had been worthwhile, the committee then contacted Rotary to see if a suitable project could be identified.

Solomon Islands is part of Rotary District 9600, most of which is in south-east Queensland.

The District's Tsunami Relief Committee had decided to focus its giving on one major project identified by Past District Governor Alan McCray and that was the rebuilding of the Udayapuram Tamil Vidyalayam School in Sri Lanka under the auspices of the Rotary clubs of Sri Lanka (District 3220).

Buoyed by the assurance that 100 per cent of their gift would be used for the project, the Solomon Islands added their money (in total just over \$US112,000) to the District 9600 gift.

"Rotary's arrangement with the Standard Chartered Bank in Sri Lanka enabled the money to be transferred at the best rates and free of commission," said Rob Jeffery, who was District 9600's governor at the time of the tsunami.

The Sri Lankans were delighted as the gift truly brought home the spirit of Christmas.

District 3220 Past Governor Ravi

Ravindran, who served as District governor in the same year as Alan McCray, wrote and told of the effect of the gift.

The money will go a long way toward rebuilding the school which is estimated to cost around \$US490,000. It will provide schooling for more than 260 children.

And the chain of events has a delightful twist. Now that the linkage between the two countries has been established, another bond has come to light.

In the years leading up to a coup in the Solomons the education system had broken down, and at present much of the aid effort from the European Union (EU) and New Zealand is going to rebuild their system (Rotary, of course, is in there too!).

"The people of the Solomons have valued the help they are receiving, and it makes it so much more meaningful to them to contribute in a tangible way to this project in Sri Lanka," said Rotarian Bruce Saunders, who was on the Solomons Fund Raising committee.

"It would be wonderful to establish a connection between the Sri Lankan school and one of our own schools, thereby sealing this gesture of friendship in perpetuity."