



other nature. They are least likely to benefit from private medical care, to know how to take preventive measures, least likely to know how to get legal aid that will make it possible for them to realize their rights to health care, least likely to be able to compensate their impairment by learning new skills, reorienting their lives.

Disasters can only rarely be foreseen: the preparation for them could, however, be planned and executed – knowing that sooner or later they will occur, because of natural causes or because of human ill-doing. But, unfortunately – and in parallel to their gradual withdrawal from responsibilities for the health and welfare of their populations – governments are also not particularly keen to invest money into preparing the answers to disasters. There is only one major exception to this trend, however: governments are making plans and preparations for one kind of disaster – war which others might inflict upon them or which they will inflict on others. Armies can help in alleviating the consequences of a natural or human-made disaster: but what they can do to repair damage is hugely disproportionate to the investment that has been made in building them up and making them able to cause it.

The Japanese government will make a magnificent gift to the populations living around the Indian ocean: they will install an early warning system that will make it more easily possible to escape the devastating onslaught of *tsunamis*. While being grateful for this generous gesture, one cannot but think about the fact that such a system could have been installed at the same time when the early warning system for the Pacific has been put into operation and shown to work well. One could argue that the system would be useless without a prior preparation of the population about ways to use it: but there are no indications that there was any effort to make the population aware of the potential benefits of such a system and enable it to learn how to use the system if it were to become available.

We are still sufficiently early in the new year to add a wish to the many New Year's wishes expressed over the past few months by all to all – the wish that we become more aware of our blessings and do more to prevent them from vanishing because we did not invest into their protection. This is of importance for ourselves, in our lives: it is also an important and unalienable task for governments and all those responsible for the health and welfare of populations all over the world.