

# Region's \$500,000 tsunami donation simply wrong

**R**egion of York politicians have donated a half-million dollars, on your behalf, to victims of the South Asian tsunami.

It was a nice thing to do. And it was the wrong thing to do.

Wrong for many reasons, on many levels but, most of all, because it's not their money.

The Dec. 26 devastation was horrific, the suffering unthinkable and the hundreds of thousands of victims clearly deserve the world's help.

But York Region politicians so urgently felt the need to add to that they have already wired \$500,000, based on chairperson Bill Fisch's "informal telephone poll" — of other councillors, mind you, not of voters.

Local taxpayers, so inclined, could already donate online, by phone or by mail.

Yet York politicians figured either: a) you were too stupid to figure out how to give; or b) you were too

cheap to give, so they'd better do it for you.

But foreign aid is one area that's pretty clear: the federal government is responsible.

And our federal government has apparently kept its finger on the pulse of the nation, over the past two weeks successively promising \$1 million, \$4 million, \$40 million, \$80 million, then \$425 million and "whatever it takes".

In fact, Canada's regular foreign aid spending is pitiful compared to many other nations — not least, the always maligned United States.

But voters last year returned the Liberals, presumably approving of their performance.

Government confiscation of your money, through taxes and re-direction to the recipient of its choice is not charity. It is wealth redistribution and doing so outside the municipality is not within the region's mandate.

That's the philosophical argument. The practical issues are



Bruce Annan

worse.

Among the dozens of agencies helping in Asia, York chose to give \$375,000 to the Red Cross and \$125,000 to World Vision — whose Canadian vice-chairperson is Markham Mayor Don Cousens.

Well, God bless World Vision and Mayor Don. But when the next crisis occurs, we'll quickly find out which politicians are affiliated with other groups: "You did it for Don, now do it for me".

And we didn't have to wait long

for the next out-thrust hand. Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor has already pointed out charity begins at home, seeking \$2.2 million for a homeless shelter.

As tragic as are recent events in South Asia, one wonders: where was York Region when hundreds of thousands were starving in Sudan? Or after earthquakes in Iran or China? Why this international crisis and why now?

Well, it's all over the news, you see, and as nature abhors a vacuum, politicians abhor news without their names and faces.

And York boys are quick to offer the usual bullet-proof rationale: "We're one of the world's most multicultural regions".

Unlike those ungenerous, homogeneous regions in, say, Newfoundland.

Indeed, York seems to be the only major Canadian municipality where politicians are giving a significant sum to tsunami relief.

Before cutting a cheque for

\$100,000, Kingston city council found time to actually publicly debate the donation. According to the local newspaper, they backed down in the face of taxpayer opposition. (Probably not "multicultural" enough...)

Stratford (ON) council contributed \$2,500 of public money — but the mayor is also donating a week of his own salary.

Proving again it's the behaviour of 90 per cent of politicians that gives the other 10 per cent a bad name.

Meanwhile, back in York: Markham Regional Councillor Jim Jones, not to appear stingy with other people's cash, would have preferred to give a full \$1 million.

"We shouldn't even have to think about it; that's about a buck per resident," Mr. Jones said.

They didn't think about it. Why should they? It's not their money.

*York Region resident Bruce Annan is a writer and consultant.*



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*Angela, Joe, Bessie & Frank Spataro*

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