

Alumni Profile: Sam Ling (MBA '04) by Jennifer Hildebrandt

Sam Ling talks to Jennifer Hildebrandt about his experience with the tsunami disaster.



Jennifer Hildebrandt: You live in Indonesia, the country most devastated by the tsunami. Can you talk a bit about your experience?

Sam Ling: On December 26, 2004, I was in a hotel room in Manado, Sulawesi (northeast Indonesia), spending the Christmas holidays away from Canada for the first time. I remember hearing the news report: “Dozens of people dead and missing after a tsunami hits the eastern coast of Sri Lanka”. I woke up an hour later to hear “Several hundred people killed after 9.0 Richter Scale earthquake/tsunami. Areas in Thailand and Sri Lanka affected” – not one word about Indonesia.

In the hours and days that followed, further reports started to come in, but now there was no mistaking the magnitude of what had happened here. Unlike war, which is an act of man and governments, the events of December 26 showed no bias for one’s faith, ethnicity, or nationality.

My experience in the aftermath has been one of sadness for the victims and a

desire, like so many, to help in some way. Foreign and local aid will need to be more than a monetary effort, and will need to be continue beyond the next major headline. The prevailing perception that the district of Banda Aceh is still an emergency zone is definitely true. I cannot give a first-hand account of what ‘ground zero’ is like in Aceh, nor would I dare try to describe what it is like to watch a loved one swept away right before one’s eyes. However, I can tell you that there are so many needs that have to be properly addressed, such as poor water quality, lack of food, minimal or makeshift shelters, joblessness, mental trauma, lack of medical supplies and facilities, environmental damage, orphans, and badly damaged industries such as crop fields and fishing villages, to name a few.

Two contrasting things have struck me most in the aftermath: the first is the tremendous aid response by many foreign nations. The second, ironically, are the reports of disorganized relief efforts, possible corruption, and the independence struggle of Aceh insurgents. Mixed in were

articles from the Jakarta Post of local Aceh university students returning to Aceh not solely for academics, but also for corpse collection. Student volunteers combed the districts of Banda Aceh to collect and dispose of hundreds of corpses each and every day. One can only imagine what we, as past students, would feel if placed in the same unimaginable conditions.

The new Indonesian government under President **Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono** (SYB) has, in my opinion, done reasonably well to bring early relief under extreme circumstances, given the country’s limited emergency response capabilities. But Indonesia still needs the international community to help organize and implement all the reconstruction efforts.

JH: Tell us about the environmentally-focused business you run in Canada and Indonesia.

SL: My company, **ieh! Canada**[®], is an international manufacturer of 100 per cent organic-based products, and was founded in 2004. Our team of researchers has developed a product line that has applications in a breadth of industries: agribusiness, marine and fishery, industrial facilities (for waste water treatment), construction and wood production, pharmaceutical, hotels and hospitals, food industries, and mining and energy. While the 50 year-old biological process we use (i.e. fermentation, hydrolysis, separation, and extraction) is hardly breakthrough technology, the identification and isolation of the necessary plant materials is our competitive advantage. In fact, each **ieh! Canada**[®] product consists of anywhere from 20 to 30 plant species.

Our Toronto office is the company’s corporate headquarters, and is responsible for international trade and marketing to North America and Europe. We recently expanded our manufacturing, sales and research operations to Jakarta, Indonesia as part of the first of three phases to build

