



# COMMONWEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Commonwealth sends Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to Maldives

The Commonwealth Secretariat is sending a Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to Maldives to assess the needs of the country and co-ordinate relief and rehabilitation work following the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster on 26 December 2004.

Colonel Linton Graham of Jamaica will spend up to two weeks in Maldives beginning 6 January. He will assist in co-ordinating relief efforts to meet the urgent needs of the country as it comes to terms with the consequences of the devastating earthquake and resulting tsunami. All of the 199 inhabited islands in the archipelago have been affected. Over 80 people have lost their lives and over 20,000 people have lost their homes or are displaced. Thirty-seven islands have had infrastructure completely destroyed and 13 inhabited islands have had to be totally evacuated. The Maldives Government estimates the damage to infrastructure will cost billions of dollars.

Colonel Graham's key tasks will be to facilitate an assessment of the immediate and long-term needs of Maldives and to support the establishment of the necessary infrastructure and logistical mechanisms for delivering humanitarian aid to the country. He will report to the National Disaster Assessment and Relief Co-ordination Centre of Maldives.

Colonel Graham co-ordinated relief efforts in Jamaica after extensive floods in 1979 and 1997 and the destruction caused by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988. He also assisted in hurricane relief work in Haiti. Colonel Graham has been appointed by Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon following an urgent request by the Government of Maldives for assistance. Announcing his appointment, the Secretary-General said, "Colonel Graham brings substantial experience managing disasters in small island states. I am sure he will make a valuable contribution in assisting an island nation which has sadly demonstrated its particular vulnerability to natural disasters."

#### **Note to Editors:**

*Colonel Graham was enlisted in the Jamaica Defence Force in May 1970 and was subsequently commissioned in December 1972, having completed his basic officer training at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, United Kingdom. He was awarded the Medal of Honour for Meritorious Service, the Clasp to the General Service Medal for service in Haiti, and the US Army Commendation Medal for duties in Haiti. He has formal training in disaster management and considerable practical experience in the field.*

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