

Women called on to help women victims

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Activists are calling on women across the country to help ease the suffering of women and child victims of the quake-triggered tsunamis in Aceh and North Sumatra.

Speaking at a press conference with the State Minister for Women's Empowerment and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**) on Saturday, women's activist Debra Yatim said that surviving the tsunami was not the end of the problem for many Acehese women and children.

She spoke of a woman and her two-month-old baby who were miraculously found alive after a couple of days floating in the sea after the disaster.

"She wanted to breast-feed her baby as she was told it might be the safest way considering there is almost no clean water available in Aceh with which to mix baby formula at the moment," Debra said.

However, after being deprived of food and having a lack of proper rest, she was producing less and less breast milk, she added.

Women's issues, however, were not touched upon at the recent emergency summit on the Asian tsunami.

"There was no discussion on the solution for women-related problems that might appear after the tsunami," said UN ambassador of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Erna Witoelar.

The problems might include stress, sexual harassment and human trafficking.

In a hope to overcome the problems, the Office of the State Minister for Women's Empowerment has set up an aid emergency center, focusing on aid that might be needed by women and children.

"We provide them with underwear, sanitary napkins and diapers for babies, something that might be missed by other institutions," said State Minister for Women's Empowerment Meutia Farida Hatta Swasono.

She also called on all Indonesian women to help each other.

"It was a massive natural disaster and we should work together to manage the recovery process until all women and children there are able to have their normal lives back. There should be a sisterhood," she said.

The minister's office has arranged three main tasks of the center for the next six months in a bid to protect women victims in the affected areas.

The office also pledged to set up trauma centers in Aceh as well as shelters for women and children to help them recover from the trauma of their ordeal as well to reunite them with their families, if possible.

"I also highlighted the threat of child trafficking at this time of emergency, as many of them might have lost their parents. These young children are vulnerable and helpless," Meutia said.

She added that her office would also set up child protection centers in refugee camps to deal with child-related problems.

"The centers will be responsible for registering children, supplying them with basic needs, tracing and reuniting them with their families," said Meutia.

The office has also organized some 380 child psychologists for counseling children in Aceh. In the long term, it will provide some 1,000 shelters for women with vocational skills to help them move on with their lives.