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Vacationing British Leader Makes First Public Comment on Tsunami Disaster

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Nearly a week after the tsunami struck in the India Ocean, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has made his first public comments on the devastating disaster.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been briefed daily on the unfolding situation, while vacationing in Egypt. But he has been strongly criticized in the British press for not returning to London to coordinate the British relief effort.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Blair was interviewed by Britain's Channel 4 Television News.

"It seemed a terrible disaster, a terrible tragedy," the prime minister said. "But I think as the days have gone on, people have recognized it as a global catastrophe. And it is not simply the absolute horror of what has happened and how many peoples' lives have been touched in different ways - and, even in our own country, most of us know people who have in some way been touched by it - but it is also the fact that the consequences of this are not just short-term and immediate, but long-term, and will require a great deal of work by the international community for months if not years to come."

Mr. Blair's government has pledged nearly \$100 million in humanitarian assistance, and private donations have outstripped even that amount.

Currently, the British public has given around \$120 million, and that figure continues to rise.

Here in London, a multi-faith candlelight vigil was held Saturday to remember those who died and the injured.

The Queen has sent a message of thanks to British volunteers and to those who have donated money.

Many New Year revelers here paused in silence before the stroke of midnight to remember those affected, and a special coordinated three-minute silence across all of the country is scheduled for Wednesday.

In addition to air assets, two British naval vessels are heading to the area to help in relief efforts.

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