



Saving Reefs Worldwide
Research Education Conservation

MEDIA RELEASE

**REEF CHECK FINDS INDONESIAN CORAL REEFS
DAMAGED BY EARTHQUAKE**

**Leading Ocean Conservation Organization Confirms
Large Areas of Coral Reef Killed When Lifted Out of the Water**

(Los Angeles) March 1, 2005 -- Dozens of square miles of living coral reefs on the remote Indonesian island of Simeulue were thrown out of the water and killed by the December 26, 2004 earthquake. The reefs were exposed when the entire island was tilted by the massive earthquake, with the north end rising as much as six feet (2 meters). According to Reef Check scientist Dr. Craig Shuman, "It was amazing to see an entire reef with thousands of coral skeletons uplifted and dead as far as the horizon."

Early reports from the medical aid organization SurfAid International prompted the request for a coral reef scientist to get involved in the humanitarian expedition that delivered food, survival supplies and health care to the villagers. With their boats destroyed by the earthquake and 15 m high tsunami, local villagers worried that their long-term food supply from the reef would be affected by this reef damage. Luckily, the coral reefs remaining underwater were not as badly damaged as the villagers had feared. Dr. Shuman carried out numerous underwater surveys using the internationally standardized Reef Check methods and found that aside from some large, overturned colonies, the reefs are in remarkably healthy condition with up to 50% of the corals still alive and fish populations abundant.

Simeulue Island, located off the northwest coast of Sumatra, was closest to the epicenter of the massive 9.0 earthquake that struck in December. Amazingly, most local villagers on the island of Simeulue escaped the tsunami that followed because they had passed down stories from previous generations regarding earthquake-tsunami combinations going back as far as the Krakatoa eruption in 1883. So they knew to run to the hills after the earthquake, and less than a dozen were killed. But the powerful shaker, which lasted for almost 15 minutes, destroyed or damaged about half the homes and most official buildings on the island.

For scientists, the discovery of large areas of coral reefs uplifted to this degree is unprecedented. For ecologists, the uplifted reefs present an unusual opportunity to study coral reef ecology without having to don wet suits and scuba tanks, and they provide a lesson in coral reef geology by showing how quickly reef terraces can be formed or destroyed.

The mission was organized by non-profit organization SurfAid International and global boardriding apparel company Quiksilver.

Founded in 1996, Reef Check is a volunteer, ocean conservation organization designed to save coral reefs globally and temperate reefs in California. Now in its eighth year of operation, Reef Check is active in over 82 countries and territories throughout the world. Reef Check is based in Los Angeles, California.

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Photo Captions: (Credit Craig Shuman)

1: Thousands of living corals were thrust out of the sea and killed by the December 26 earthquake. White skeletons are all that remain.



2: Underwater surveys by Reef Check show that damage to the remaining reefs was not as bad as feared, with only a few overturned corals and fish populations still abundant.

