

# ***NICARAGUA: DROUGHT***

**appeal no: 16/97  
10 October 1997**

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 1,600,000  
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES  
TO ASSIST 75,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR 4 MONTHS***

## ***Summary***

The impact of the 1997 El Niño phenomenon on vulnerable communities continues. Severe drought is affecting nine of Nicaragua's 16 departments, threatening famine and bringing hunger to more than 300,000 people in this stricken land. The Nicaraguan Red Cross, which is working with the government in the face of the emergency, is appealing - through the International Federation - to sister Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for resources to provide food, water containers and soap to 12,500 families for four months in the two most affected departments.



## *The Context*

The recent history of Nicaragua is peppered with social, economic and political problems which have undermined many of the country's essential structures. A UN report, prepared in 1997, places the country in 127th position globally in terms of human development - on the American continent, only Haiti is lower. It is estimated that almost half the Nicaraguan population of four million is extremely impoverished and a further million exist below the poverty line; up to 60 per cent of the potential workforce is unemployed.

From a humanitarian perspective, problems of special concern include:

- Insufficient provision of health services, potable water and environmental health, particularly in rural areas.
- Almost 30 per cent of child births are attended by non-qualified personnel, while 15 per cent of children have a low weight at birth; infant mortality stands at 68 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality at 160 per 100,000.
- A growing incidence of natural disasters in recent years has contributed to environmental degradation, increasing the likelihood of further disasters.
- Persistent socio-political conflicts are obstructing the peace-building process and consistently threatening further violence.
- Insufficient educational and recreational opportunities affect wide sectors of the youth population.
- Begging, vagrancy, prostitution and black-marketeering are very prevalent, especially in Managua.

## *The Disaster*

The El Niño phenomenon, which occurs roughly twice a decade, disturbs weather patterns around the world, wreaking havoc and destruction. This year's occurrence has been cited as potentially the worst this century. In Nicaragua, Latin America's second poorest country, the situation of many rural communities is already critical due to prolonged socio-economic and political difficulties, thus limiting the options for identifying and implementing mechanisms to confront new catastrophes, such as the drought currently gripping much of the land.

Recent surveys of the disaster area indicate a 75 per cent loss in crops in the first cycle of planting in the western departments of Chinandega, Esteli, Granada, León, Managua, Masaya, Ocotal, Rivas and Somoto. The normal September planting has not taken place through lack of any moisture in the ground for germination. Due to El Niño, no rains are predicted in the foreseeable future, thus visiting very severe hunger on an already impoverished population. With little hope for any immediate relief in the weather patterns, inevitably food prices are rising. Even in the Atlantic zone of the country, where rainfalls are usually abundant, crop production is down. More than 80 per cent of the corn, beans, sorghum and vegetable output is lost and pasture land has been so badly affected that milk yields are down by half. With all their food reserves exhausted and unemployment on the increase, small farmers especially are in crisis.

## *The Response so far*

### **Government Action •**

The Nicaraguan government has requested international assistance through the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs and already taken rapid remedial action in 11 municipalities. These efforts are being coordinated with non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross has been asked to help.

**Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •**

Together with civil defence personnel, the Nicaraguan Red Cross has carried out a survey in the worst affected departments of Chinandega and León, also distributing food - but stocks are now completely exhausted.

## ***The Intended Operation***

**Assessment of Needs •**

The Nicaraguan Red Cross, working with civil defence units, has carried out an extensive survey to identify the most vulnerable families in the worst hit areas of Chinandega and León .

**Red Cross Objectives •**

- To alleviate the urgent nutritional needs of 12,500 especially vulnerable families (75,000 people) in Chinandega and León through three food distributions over the coming four months; and also to provide soap and water containers.
- To train volunteers and equip the branches of the Nicaraguan Red Cross to further strengthen the Society's capacities to cope with relief operations and to further future disaster preparedness programmes.

**Anticipated Later Needs •**

If the rains fail over the next four months, an assessment will be undertaken to identify communities where an expanded water programme, together with digging and rehabilitation of wells, will be necessary.

## ***National Society/Federation Plan of Action***

The Nicaraguan Red Cross plans to assist 12,500 families (75,000 people) in the worst affected areas in the departments of Chinandega and León through three distributions of a food basket - complementing the existing diet - comprising 2.5 kg per person of each of the following items: rice, beans, corn, sugar and oats & orgeat (to prepare a local beverage), together with salt (2.5 kg per family) and edible oil (four litres per family). Distributions of soap (one box of 12 bars per family) - to maintain minimum hygiene standards - and containers for clean drinking water storage (one per family) are also intended.

Subject to funding, the operation will begin at once with procurement, transport and packing activities. Each beneficiary family will receive a ration card to be presented at the three distributions, with the precise methodology to be finalised on the assignment of an International Federation relief delegate.

Throughout each phase of the operation, the Nicaraguan Red Cross will deploy experienced volunteers, with senior branch officials responsible for ensuring overall efficiency and accountability.

The International Federation's Regional Delegation in San José, Costa Rica, will assist the National Society throughout and at least one Spanish-speaking delegate from the region will be assigned to Nicaragua for the duration of the operation.

A regime of 'continuous evaluation' will apply from the start, to enable a timely and reasoned decision on whether the operation should be extended and to ensure standard International Federation monitoring and reporting procedures are maintained.

An integral element of the operation will be training volunteers and equipping the branches of the Nicaraguan Red Cross to further strengthen its capacities to cope with relief operations and to further future disaster preparedness programmes.

#### **Capacity of the National Society •**

The Nicaraguan Red Cross operates nationwide and currently comprises 36 branches, two of which are situated in the operational area. It has a wide network of volunteers and considerable experience in relief programmes, including floods and volcanic eruptions.

#### **Present Capacity of the International Federation in Nicaragua •**

The Regional Delegation in San José, through its disaster preparedness delegate, is already assisting the National Society with guidance/advice and liaison with the International Federation's Geneva Secretariat. At least one International Federation delegate will be contracted and placed in Nicaragua to assist the Society throughout the operation.

#### **Information/media •**

Efforts will be made both within the region and in Geneva to highlight the emergency on global TV and radio channels, with particular emphasis on Spanish-speaking outlets.

#### **Evaluation •**

An evaluation will be carried out in accordance with the International Federation's principles and rules for relief operations.

## ***Budget summary***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The target population for this vital appeal is suffering from the country's prolonged socio-economic crisis, further aggravated by many debilitating natural disasters. The present drought has led to the loss of this season's crops and is also severely affecting the planting for the next harvest. To survive with dignity in the coming four months, the impoverished families targeted by this appeal urgently need the food parcels and other assistance identified by the Nicaraguan Red Cross.

Donors are invited to contribute, preferable in cash, rapidly and generously to this operation. Further information can be obtained from the Director of the International Federation's Americas Department, Santiago Gil, (tel: 41-22-730-4391) or the programme officer, Johanna Karlsson, (tel.: 41-22-730-4258), standing in for Darrel Diedrichs.

Margareta Wahlström  
Under Secretary General,  
Disaster Response & Operations Coordination

George Weber  
Secretary General

appeal no. 16/9 /

T:\APPEALS\97\1697.SAM  
13/10/97