

## **CENTRAL AMERICA**

### **REHABILITATION PROGRAMME AFTER HURRICANE MITCH**

#### **Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador**

Hurricane Mitch swept across several Central American countries in late October and early November 1998, killing more than 10,000 people and affecting 3.8 million people. Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador and hit Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize with recurrent violent winds and torrential rain. It is considered the worst natural disaster ever to hit Central America. The destruction of agriculture, housing and infrastructure was on an unprecedented scale. Damage to highways, roads, bridges, electricity, water and sewage systems, communications systems, housing and schools remains a major problem. It is estimated that 80% of the basic crops of the four worst hit countries have been affected.

The International Federation mobilised support for the Operating National Societies of the affected countries for a massive emergency relief operation, started immediately after the disaster. It included the rescue and evacuation of victims, damage and needs assessment, feeding the homeless and providing emergency medical assistance. The emergency operation was co-ordinated by the International Federation with the financial and operational support of the Participating National Societies, in particular the Spanish Red Cross.

The Red Cross strategy for the rehabilitation phase is focusing on community centred rehabilitation, including public health support and education, food security (seeds and tools, fishing boats and nets and income generation activities where possible), housing reconstruction and rehabilitation and the continuation of activities within regional or local disaster preparedness programmes.

The second main issue in the rehabilitation phase will be the Red Cross network itself. This agenda will include disaster preparedness and integration into the Federation disaster response system, income generation, strengthening of governance and management, and the upgrading of communications and telecommunications.

Response to the emergency phase was positive. Donors are urged to remain consistent in their approach to this situation and to include the rehabilitation appeal in their 1999 funding. Their support will give the four National Societies a unique opportunity to take part in the respective national rehabilitation processes by providing assistance to the most needy communities

Copies of the appeal are available on request.

## **CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

# REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

CHF 5,149,000

Programme no 01.21/99

## Introduction

The International Federation's Regional Delegation has been working with the National Societies of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Canada and the United States since 1977. In 1997 the Delegation moved from San José to Guatemala in order to reinforce support to the Guatemalan Red Cross in a comprehensive post-conflict rehabilitation process.

Apart from the United States and Canada, the countries covered by the Delegation face a general situation of poverty, extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth, and little government capacity to cope with the rise of malnutrition and the spread of diseases. Their populations live under the constant threats of natural disasters and human violence, as political stability in countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua hangs precariously in the balance. The ongoing civil conflicts in Colombia and Mexico (Chiapas), with no lasting solution in sight, are an increasing source of concern.

There are varying levels of development among the National Societies of the region, reflecting the political and socio-economic diversity of the countries covered. Because of this wide range of Red Cross realities, the Delegation focuses its action on the shared concept of "working as a Federation". Consequently, various NS networks built along thematic lines (health, disaster preparedness, youth, etc.) have sprung up, which can play a pivotal role in the transfer of technology, know-how and experience among National Societies of the region. Apart from the benefits of "building from within", the sustainability of such initiatives is better ensured, while enabling the Delegation to promote and optimise the use of regional human resources. Such programmes share an overall parallel strategy of building the capacities of National Societies while redirecting efforts towards realistic human development and local partnership.

Hurricane Mitch, which occurred just over a month before this Emergency Appeal went to press, turned the Regional Delegation into a co-ordinating hub for the aid pouring into the region and will continue to influence the Delegation's work in the months to come. The Delegation's role during the rehabilitation phase of the Federation-co-ordinated operation is defined in the rehabilitation appeal.

## Objectives

The Federation will:

- Provide communities with the know-how and confidence to confront everyday emergencies with existing local capacities through Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Education;
- Improve the disaster response capacity of the region by putting in place effective response mechanisms which will allow for rapid and appropriate interventions in case of a disaster; build enhanced regional co-operation in disaster response;
- Consolidate and, where needed, establish regional networks between National Societies in various areas of health and social welfare (such as First Aid, Blood Programmes, HIV/AIDS and Community Health) to better meet the needs of the populations seeking collective solutions to common problems;
- Assist National Societies to make measurable progress in building stronger institutions, working towards financial self-reliance through a comprehensive resource development programme, while raising the profile of Red Cross nationally and in the region;
- Support the National Societies in strengthening and better organising their volunteer base at all levels, with particular attention to governance, recruitment of new volunteers and training;
- Reinforce the commitment of National Societies to the Youth Red Cross, developing their programmes and organisation;
- Provide technical and administrative support to the ongoing Rehabilitation Programme in Guatemala.

#### Programmes

- Disaster Preparedness and Response

Natural disasters are a frequent occurrence in the region. Communities in remote areas are often the worst affected due to their lack of access to public services and their isolation. In response to this problem, a Community Education Project in Disaster Preparedness was initiated in 1995 by the Delegation, targeting especially vulnerable communities. Since then, the programme has been expanded to 16 Latin American National Societies. A mid-term evaluation carried out in 1997 (available upon request) confirmed the effectiveness of this initiative.

Three of the programme's main achievements are: the integration of the project into the National Societies' current activities, the creation of standard community education material for all the involved countries, and the existence of a regional network of well-trained facilitators to carry out the programme's rigorous training schedule.

In the coming year the Delegation, in co-ordination with the Southern Cone Delegation, will continue monitoring the implementation of the project so as to complete the hand over of responsibility to the National Societies.

In the area of disaster response, the Regional Delegation will improve the regional capacity through the following project:

#### Strengthening disaster response capacity

The overall objective is to consolidate the Regional Network of Relief Delegates for both rapid needs assessment and direct disaster management action. The aim is also to improve National Societies' supply, warehousing and telecommunications systems, thus strengthening their national relief departments. Standardising training methodologies for a more uniform administration and action in case of disasters is another important element.

- Health and Social Welfare

The majority of the population in the region lives in conditions of extreme poverty. Public health care systems are in most cases weak or non-existent. Increasingly, National Societies are playing a greater role in providing marginalised populations with basic health care services and training, and in raising awareness of how to prevent the spread of epidemics.

The Regional Delegation, through the Regional Health Delegate – who provides assistance to all Latin American National Societies – is committed to promoting and improving National Societies' health and social welfare activities and to addressing regional challenges with common and collective strategies.

Two projects are designed to accomplish this task.

#### Regional Health Networks

In order to better address the health care needs of vulnerable communities, this project will consolidate the existing Regional Networks among the National Societies of the region in the areas of First Aid and Blood Programmes. Secondly, it will establish new Regional Networks in the areas of HIV/AIDS, Social Welfare and Community Health. The Delegation will support the formation and consolidation of these networks by creating fora for reflection and providing National Societies with the tools to guide their action, such as policy guidelines, technical information, and contact with international donors.

#### Gulf of Fonseca Project

This community development project has been designed as a regional pilot project which will implement specific health and social welfare activities for extremely vulnerable communities in the region of the Gulf of Fonseca, shared by Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras. It is built on a co-ordinated approach by the three National Societies concerned, enhancing cross-border co-operation to address common problems.

Through the National Societies' local branches, in co-ordination with the local authorities, and with the involvement of the target communities themselves, the project aims at providing the population with the necessary tools to organise themselves and reduce their vulnerability. It proposes to enhance the role of traditional health promoters, who will be trained in First Aid, disaster preparedness and environmental protection, and additionally, to rehabilitate and construct basic sanitation infrastructure. It is planned to train 90 community health agents in prevention education and community mobilisation in water and sanitation projects. The

strategy of this project has been tested in South America; it constitutes the first attempt in this region at cross-border co-operation.

- **Volunteers and Youth**

In 1999 particular importance will be accorded to the support and training of governance bodies, reinforcing the recruitment and organisation of volunteers, and resource development.

Most of the activities of the Regional Delegation are focused on strengthening the institutional capacity of National Societies in the region. In practical terms this means technical support for the renewal of their statutes, collaboration in planning and training in subjects such as project management or administration.

Awareness of a crisis in volunteerism is increasing. All too often the value of volunteers goes unrecognised and they are under-utilised, leading to a reduction in their numbers in some Societies.

Youth Red Cross are among the most active volunteers, although sometimes focused only on collaboration in relief activities. In order to strengthen youth programmes and integrate young people into development activities, the Regional Delegation has been working since 1996 with the National Societies of the region to consolidate stable youth structures and to create a regional Youth Committee - which today co-ordinates nearly all regional youth initiatives - aimed at Red Cross youth becoming more involved in their communities through School Programmes.

In order to encourage ongoing initiatives with Red Cross Youth, while giving special support to revitalising National Societies' volunteer structures, the following projects will be undertaken:

#### Volunteer Structures

In response to the acute concern of some National Societies in recent years over the steady deterioration of their volunteer base, the Delegation will devote significant effort in 1999 to assisting with the development of volunteer human resource policies and strategies, including recruitment, maintenance and long-term volunteer development. The project will assist National Societies in increasing volunteer numbers, and diversifying their volunteer base. An initial baseline survey will provide the parameters for a national volunteer management plan and corresponding administrative policy aimed at a more conscious and structured approach at volunteer development.

#### Development of Red Cross Youth

Like all regional programming, this project takes a dual approach - building capacity within the institution, while providing vital services to the community. The Delegation will support the strengthening of youth structures, youth leadership training, and administration of youth programming. At the community level, the project will seek to provide informal education to school-aged youth through comprehensive school programmes on preventive health, environment, disaster preparedness and the rights of the child. Through dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, this initiative strives to develop the intellectual, physical and moral capacity of children and young adults. Ultimately, the goal is

to cultivate a broader volunteer base upon which National Societies can build a more certain future.

- Resource Development and Communication

One significant change in 1998 has been the presence of qualified information professionals in the Regional Delegations of Latin America, giving greater coverage to regional events, be they crisis-generated or developmental. The profile of the National Societies of the region vis-à-vis donors has been heightened through coverage of their activities in regional periodical publications, as well as in the Secretariat-based media. The close co-ordination with the Delegation in Buenos Aires will continue in order to produce and promote the distribution of information on Red Cross. The production of Latin American News and other materials will continue, and special emphasis will be given to the Region's Web Page. Ties with the Regional Delegation of the ICRC based in Guatemala will be strengthened, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to communications strategies throughout the region.

Despite a heightened profile, most National Societies of the region are still largely dependent on international support, government funding, or on a single source of income, while strategic alliances with the growing private sector is still an unexplored field. At the same time, communication activities within National Societies have few links with fund-raising activities and, moreover, are concentrated at Headquarters level. As a result most Societies continue to be negatively affected by financial instability, limiting their ability to perform effectively.

Recently, a group of National Societies in the region created a Fund-raising and Communications Regional Forum, demonstrating their awareness of these issues, and a desire to improve their capacities in this field. One of the 1999 priorities will therefore be to help National Societies fortify their resource development and communication activities through the following initiatives:

#### Resource Development and Communication

This project will strengthen Societies' institutional structures so they can improve their image and their ability to recruit and motivate volunteers, thus reinforcing their fund-raising capacities. It will be linked to resource mobilisation by the Secretariat in Geneva and co-ordinated with similar projects already underway in the Caribbean and in the Southern Cone. New corporate alliances with private companies will be one component of the project, which targets both headquarters and branches.

The Regional Delegation will recruit a Resource Development Delegate to co-ordinate and enhance the Communications and Fund-raising Regional Forum activities, giving special support to less able National Societies. After one year, it is expected that the Regional Forum will be able to assume responsibility for the project. The creation of a regional communications and fund-raising network will be based on a plan of action and regional strategy. A delegate will work closely and co-ordinate all initiatives with both the Information Delegate in the Buenos Aires Regional Delegation and a local press officer in Guatemala.

#### Long Distance Education Project for Red Cross Communicators (LDEP)

This project is presented in the appeals for both Latin American Regional Programmes (see also the Appeal for the Southern Cone) since it is a pilot project for both the Chilean and Colombian Red Cross Societies.

The project aims at improving the National Societies' information capacity before, during and after a crisis by giving them the tools for improving communications between branches and their Headquarters. It also aims to improve the National Societies' image among the beneficiary population, and enhance their relations with donors who are becoming more demanding about information on events and needs when disaster strikes. Identified volunteers at branch level will be trained and given specific tools that will enable them to become an extension of their NS spokesperson in the field.

- Support to Rehabilitation Programme in Guatemala

(See Programme no 22)