

CENTRAL AMERICA: HURRICANE MITCH

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The relief phase is continuing with the same degree of intensity. Concrete plans are being implemented to assist a minimum of 40,000 families through the Red Cross network with food, water and other assistance. These numbers will increase as more support is channelled through the Operating National Societies. Attention is also now turning to the Rehabilitation Phase with a Planning Team now in the field.

The context

Hurricane Mitch swept across several Central American countries in late October/ early November killing at least 10,502 people and affecting 3.8 million people. The destruction of housing, agriculture, and infrastructure is on an unprecedented scale. Damage to highways, roads, bridges, electricity, water and sewage systems, communications systems, housing and schools all remain major problems. It is estimated that 80% of the basic food crops of the four countries have been affected.

The International Federation continues to mobilise support for the Operating National Societies in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and held a meeting November 16 in Geneva with Participating National Societies to share information on the emergency response to date and to have a preliminary discussion regarding the rehabilitation phase. A Planning Mission on Reconstruction and Rehabilitation left the Secretariat this week for a three-week assessment in the region. A meeting is scheduled for next Monday with the leadership of the Operating National Societies in Guatemala in which the Head of the Americas Department will participate.

Latest events

The vulnerable victims of Mitch are threatened by new disasters. For instance, in Nicaragua, a small earthquake last week caused additional mudslides. There is also concern that the health situation may deteriorate in the near future given overcrowding in shelters, food and water shortages, and the lack of vector control.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Regional Overview •

The ONS and the Regional Delegation, assisted by an Assessment and Planning Team recently arrived from Geneva, are reassessing the situation in light of the amount of external aid that is arriving and the statistics on disaster damages, and also formulating a strategy for Red Cross involvement in the

Reconstruction and Rehabilitation phase. It is aimed to have a Framework for Red Cross Action to be presented to the first meeting of the UN-OCHA convened Inter-Agency Task Force on Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in New York on December 9 and 10 with the major international financial institutions.

In continued support to the emergency phase five ECHO contracts valued at some CHF 3 million have been awarded to the Spanish and German RC to provide emergency assistance to Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. A third British RC relief flight is due to bring quantities of relief materials, including eight Cholera Kits, to all four countries this week.

The Federation has agreed with the Spanish Red Cross that much of the food procurement will be done through the Spanish Red Cross office in Panama to avoid duplication of efforts. An initial target of 4,000 mts of rice, beans and oil is being set.

Honduras •

The latest figures show 7,002 dead, 8,373 missing, 2,100,721 evacuated, and 1,932,482 affected in Honduras. There are still 190 shelters in operation in the country. Currently there are 15 volunteers from the Costa Rican Red Cross, 11 from the Mexican Red Cross, 12 from El Salvador Red Cross and 27 citizens of Belize who, through the National Society of their country, are working in Honduras.

An estimated 6,500 volunteers have worked during the whole Mitch operation; the National Society continues with search and rescue missions as there are still some isolated communities that have not been reached. They are also continuing to record the names of victims for future food distributions and taking supplies to the 169 shelters still in operation in the city of Tegucigalpa.

In the overall framework of the Red Cross response to emergency needs, at least 26,000 families are benefiting from food, water and other assistance provided through a broad coalition of PNS/ Federation support channelled through the Honduran Red Cross. The Federation team, in conjunction with their local counterparts, are working on a plan of action to assist 6,500 families with food packages for two months.

The two Swedish and Austrian Red Cross ERUs have arrived in the country. The ERU water experts have decided with the Honduran RC to place the units in Choluteca, third largest city in Honduras, 200 kilometres south of Tegucigalpa. They are now trying to obtain, with the Honduran Air Force, assistance to move the equipment by air from Tegucigalpa to Choluteca.

Coordination meetings continue to take place with the Honduran Armed Forces, fire department, National Emergency Commission, COPECO (Comisión Permanente de Contingencias), CODEM (Comisión de Emergencia Municipal) and UN representatives. The Federation head of mission is requesting the Mexican Red Cross to send a team of psychologists to assist victims suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

The Spanish Red Cross contingent, composed of 10 delegates, has begun operations in the northern part of the country. Their plan of action calls for assisting 13,500 families for 2 months with food packages made up of rice, salt, beans, sugar, lard, corn, soap, chlorine, kitchen sets and 3 blankets and plan to install 3 mobile warehouses. They will also be purchasing for the operation 4 Land Rovers, 3 trucks, radio communication equipment and medical supplies. They have brought in three 1,000 m³ mobile water purification plants and are importing other ten similar plants. The Spanish Red Cross has transferred CHF 274,000 to the National Society to assist with its operating expenses and sent a airlift of 30 tons of humanitarian aid.

The German Red Cross, with ECHO funds, has purchased food items in Mexico and is transporting them by land on 32 trucks. Their plan of action calls for the distribution of basic food packages for 4,000 families for 2 months in the provinces of Santa Barbara and Lempira. There are currently two

delegates, one expatriate head of mission and one Costa Rican Red Cross delegate. Two more German expatriate delegates are expected shortly.

The American Red Cross is providing 20 tons rice, 20 tonnes of chemical supplies for water purification, CHF 548,000 in medicines, CHF 548,000 for operation expenses and the purchase of two trucks for the food distribution. They currently have one delegate in the field carrying out a health assessment. The American Red Cross has transferred an initial CHF 274,000 to the National Society to assist with its immediate operating expenses.

The British Red Cross has sent two delegates with an airlift of humanitarian aid, one press delegate and a logistic delegate. The Press delegate will remain in the country for two to three weeks longer covering the Red Cross activities for the Secretariat of the Federation.

The DWI (Disaster Welfare Inquires) system set up by the Youth Committee member of the Mexican Red Cross has received 558 requests with nine cases responses and is working full-time on this new activity.

Nicaragua •

The latest figures show 3,000 dead, 2,190 missing, 500,000 evacuated, and 730,000 affected (17% of the population) of Nicaragua. Moreover, many peasants are threatened by the risk of explosion of land mines from the past conflict, now unearthed and scattered across the country by the floods. There are 200 shelters in operation in the country. The extensive damage to its infrastructure and communications system resulted in more than 140 small villages being out of reach except by helicopter. The contamination of wells and destruction of the water distribution systems is increasing the risk of cholera, dengue and malaria.

Since the beginning of the emergency, the Nicaraguan Red Cross has been active in all 16 departments where it has local branches. Besides rescue operations carried out in very remote areas, the NS has distributed to date 263 tonnes of food and non-food items throughout the 14 departments. In order to maximise its effectiveness in spite of its limited resources, the NS is concentrating most of its efforts in the department of Chinandega where there is a high concentration of people affected.

The Federation has a team of four delegates working in support of the National Society and helping with co-ordination of the incoming assistance. Particular attention is being given to needs assessment, logistics, information management and coordination.

The Spanish Red Cross has a team of six delegates who jointly with the NRC have been developing a plan mainly for Chinandega, but also the departments of Esteli, Matagalpa and Leon. A first distribution of food and non-food items took place in Chinandega this week. The Spanish Red Cross has ordered three 8-tonne trucks to support its operation, as well as portable water-purification plants.

The DWI system is in place and there have been 63 requests for tracing that are currently being processed. On 14 November, an ICRC Tracing delegate arrived to provide short-term assistance to the newly created tracing unit.

There is an American Red Cross delegate in Managua with the purpose of opening a pipeline for airlift emergency supplies, including food, water containers and uniforms for the NS volunteers. The American Red Cross is considering the purchase of one 5-tonne UNIMOG and one 8-tonne 4x4 truck to strengthen the NS's transport capacity in remote areas.

The French Red Cross has sent a delegate to Nicaragua on an assessment mission. After coordinating with the local Red Cross branch and the local government authorities of Matagalpa, the French Red Cross is considering providing five water tanks, distributed in strategic locations in and around the town. Four of these areas will involve pumping water from the river and purifying with chlorine, the

fifth area will require transport from one of the previous sources. The project would benefit 16,000 people. Also being considered is the distribution of plastic sheeting, blankets and seeds.

The German Red Cross delegate/water ERU specialist arrived on 10 November to prepare the ground for the installation and operation of a water purifying plant. The ERU is on loan by the Peruvian Red Cross and is due to arrive in Managua at the end of this week or early next week, along with a team of 5 Peruvian technicians. The ERU specialist will travel to the field on 16 November to investigate and identify the best location for the plant.

The Federation delegate has initiated the establishment of an information unit in the offices of the NRC with the purpose of facilitating coordination with the RC system, and globally with government authorities, UN agencies, as well as foreign and local NGOs. The Federation delegate has also been asked by the Canadian Red Cross to coordinate the airlift of humanitarian aid coming in from various Canadian NGOs .

A coordination meeting is planned for next week between UNICEF, PAHO, Nicaraguan Red Cross and delegates to present plans for the reconstruction phase. UNICEF is proposing to establish a psycho-social rehabilitation project for children.

Guatemala •

The latest figures show a total of 258 dead, 106,600 evacuees, 121 missing, 749,533 affected (10% of the country's population).

The Federation is supporting the National Society with a team of three.

The Spanish Red Cross has six delegates and support staff at a regional level based in Guatemala to coordinate all their Hurricane Mitch relief operations in Central America. For their Guatemalan operation they have five delegates and have \$650,000 to assist the most affected areas of the country with an emergency food distribution programme which will consist of the distribution of 40,000 family packages.

On 17 November the German Red Cross announced the donation of a 8 tonne truck from Mercedes Benz which will be delivered immediately.

El Salvador •

The latest figures show 272 dead, 49,000 evacuees, 100 missing and approximately 100,000 affected.

The Spanish Red Cross has announced a package relief programme for a total of \$600,000 consisting of the distribution of 40,000 food packages, family hygiene products, water containers and buckets.

The Red Cross of El Salvador is currently distributing food packages, water and clothing to the families that are returning to their houses or have been assigned a piece of land where they can relocate to by the government in such places as Usulután, San Miguel and Playa el Cuco. Two Federation delegates are being deployed in support.

Costa Rica, Belize and Panama •

These countries have covered their most pressing needs and are now sending volunteers and relief assistance to their neighbours.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Regional Delegation and the ONS continue co-operation with governments and inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations.

In a recent visit to Guatemala City, the European Union Humanitarian Commissioner, Mrs. Emma Bonino, highlighted the importance of the work the Red Cross Societies, the International Federation and other organisations are carrying out with ECHO resources and their own resources.

Contributions

See Annexes 1 for details of cash and kind contributions. PNS are advised to ensure that Operations Funding and Reporting and the Americas Department are kept fully updated about cash and in-kind contributions.

Conclusion

Participating National Societies and other donors are thanked for the technical and financial support they have contributed to the appeal.

Donors are urged to continue responding to the outstanding needs as highlighted in the appeal.

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