

# ***CENTRAL AMERICA: HURRICANE MITCH***

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*period covered: 26 November - 14 December*

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*The Federation's operations in the four countries most affected by Hurricane Mitch are now in full swing. Food distributions are under way, emergency water units are providing safe water to tens of thousands, and medical care is being taken to rural areas. While emergency goods continue to arrive, planning is moving forward to rebuild homes and provide seeds and tools. A transitional appeal is about to be released, extending assistance to the next harvest, in May/June next year. Federation President, Dr. Astrid Heiberg, completed a visit to the region this week. The Federation was represented at the Inter-American Development Bank Consultative Group meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America, 10-11 December.*

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## ***The context***

After the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch between 22 October and 1 November, Federation co-ordinated relief operations are now under way in all four badly hit Central American countries -- Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. To reinforce the relief activities of the four Operating National Societies, the Federation launched a revised appeal on 4 November for CHF 12,570,000 to assist 180,000 beneficiaries for three months.

To-date, the Federation has transferred CHF 5.7 million to support the National Societies in the region, and has co-ordinated the deployment of 40 delegates and the shipment of several thousand tons of relief goods. Negotiations are on-going with WFP at regional and country level to reach an agreement whereby Operating National Societies (ONS) will partner WFP in the distribution of food aid until May next year.

The latest official statistics put the total number of deaths at 9,745, with 1,736,285 people directly affected and 93,690 dwellings either totally destroyed or badly damaged. An estimated 70-80% of the territory of the four countries has suffered from flooding, mud slides or severe wind damage.

## ***Latest events***

The emergency relief phase is continuing in the worst-affected parts of the region. In Honduras, the curfew imposed the day after the hurricane was lifted on 30 November, but restrictions on the use of automobiles, to prevent both traffic jams in the capital city of Tegucigalpa and further deterioration of the environment, are still in place. A new law passed on 3 December prohibits construction in areas

categorized as “high risk”. As of 8 December, commercial airlines are again allowed to land at night in Tegucigalpa.

Two central warehouses have been set up in Tegucigalpa for all incoming donations and computer terminals for SUMA (a PAHO-computerized administration of emergency supplies system) have been installed in them. They will also be under the supervision of the National Honduran Comptroller's office.

### **HEALTH SITUATION •**

Cholera figures are starting to rise and there are indications that haemorrhagic dengue is on the increase. Leptospirosis is an increasing cause of concern in Nicaragua. With the support of the British Red Cross, the Federation has deployed 25 WHO New Emergency Health Kits with a potential for reaching some 250,000 people over three months, and eight Cholera Kits, sufficient for a population of one million people. Three kits are for Guatemala, the worst-affected country in the region. All ONS are being supplied with educational material on basic preventive health measures and are becoming involved in fumigation campaigns.

#### **- Honduras**

The latest figures show a total of 1,362 cases of cholera, with 17 deaths. Leptospirosis cases remain at 6 suspected cases and 5 confirmed cases. The Ministry of Health reports 1,080 cases of classic dengue through 4 December. Of 33 suspected cases of haemorrhagic dengue, 15 were confirmed and the rest are under analysis.

#### **- Nicaragua**

Figures for the period 2 Nov.- 10 Dec. show 1,504 suspected cases of cholera, but no deaths. There have been 612 suspected cases of leptospirosis reported post Mitch, with seven deaths; the worst affected areas are Chinandega and Esteli. Dengue cases number 1,244 during the period 1 November to date, with no figures on haemorrhagic type dengue.

#### **- El Salvador**

Eight cases of cholera and one death have been reported, according to PAHO. The Ministry of Health reports 1,670 cases of dengue fever, with 12 possible cases of haemorrhagic dengue in the urban area of San Salvador.

#### **- Guatemala**

Guatemala is the country worst affected by cholera. According to PAHO, cholera increased notably in November. In the four weeks, 395, 530, 450 and 566 cases respectively were reported. In this total of 1,941 cases, 383 were confirmed. Through 2 December, the Ministry of Public Health reported 33 deaths due to cholera. The source of infection in almost all outbreaks was contaminated food.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

A six-person regional relief management team has been established in the Guatemala Regional Delegation, working directly with the four National Societies and the Federation staff in those countries. Its chief mandate is to ensure that the efforts of all Federation members in the region are well co-ordinated. It provides technical support in health, relief, water and sanitation, logistics, information, reporting and finance.

The Federation's President, Dr. Astrid Heiberg, completed a successful four-day visit to the affected countries. She held press conferences in each country, emphasizing the collaboration of sister societies that have come to the aid of victims of Hurricane Mitch.

### **HONDURAS**

The Honduran Red Cross (HRC), in close collaboration with the Federation's Team Leader, continues assisting hurricane victims, in coordination with the Participating National Societies. Its administrative structure is being strengthened by the arrival of technical personnel from the Spanish, German, American and British Red Cross Societies.

The HRC reports it has received 1,400 tons of relief with over 800 tons distributed, including food, blankets, clothing, cooking equipment and medicines, to an estimated 120,000 people. Federation funds have been used mainly to support operational expenses such as transportation, and emergency medical and rescue equipment.

In co-ordination meetings led by the Honduran RC, supported by the Federation, the country has been divided for relief purposes as follows:

<b>Provinces:</b>	<b>National Society:</b>
Cortés & Colón	Honduran RC and Spanish RC
Yoro & Atlántida	Honduran RC, British RC and American RC
Santa Bárbara & Lempira	Honduran RC and German RC
Choluteca & Valle	Honduran RC, American RC and Federation
Olancho & El Paraiso	Honduran RC, American RC and Federation

The HRC Blood Bank is now operational, although at a reduced capacity. It has organized a blood drive at the local university, in order to cover the 500 units required for the approaching holiday season. Some of the damaged equipment is being replaced by the Spanish Red Cross, with funds provided by the Federation and a \$6,500 USD donation from the regional network of blood banks.

The Disaster Welfare Inquiries (DWI) office has received 1,379 tracing requests, of which 667 have been resolved. The Regional ICRC Delegation has lent a vehicle to assist DWI work.

Communications experts of the NS, Federation delegates and external advisors are designing a radio communications programme which will cover the whole of Honduras. It is expected to be ready later this week.

A Federation information delegate is publicizing Red Cross relief efforts and his reports and photographs are being redistributed by Geneva. His mission terminates on 18 December.

#### ***Austrian RC/Swedish RC***

The ERUs (Mass Water/Sanitation and One Specialised ERU) installed by the Swedish and Austrian RC are providing 400,000 litres of water daily to the town of Choluteca with a population of 120,000 people. Wheelbarrows, shovels and other sanitation equipment has been handed over to the municipality for their cleaning efforts. The ERU technicians are now training local Red Cross personnel.

#### ***Spanish Red Cross***

The Honduran Red Cross, the Federation and the Spanish Red Cross team of 10 delegates identified 11,654 beneficiary families in four Departments: Cortés, Yoro, La Atlántida and Colón and distributed food to these four provinces. The Spanish RC is also operating 15 portable water plants run by two technicians.

#### ***German Red Cross***

The first ECHO funded food distributions by German RC/Honduran RC got underway last week in Choluteca following the arrival of 32 trucks with basic food items from Mexico. Assistance will be provided to 13,500 families. There will be a second distribution at the end of December. Kitchen sets are also being distributed.

The German Red Cross will supply tools and construction materials for a reconstruction programme in which the beneficiaries themselves will do the work. It has also signed a MoU with the German Foreign Ministry to supply temporary roofing materials for a total of 500,000 DM for the rehabilitation of 520 homes. It is currently working on plans for the reconstruction of 2,000 houses in Choluteca. The Foreign Ministry has also offered office furnishings for Honduran Red Cross chapters as part of a plan to improve the equipment and infrastructure of the Society.

The Dole Company has offered free shipment of relief goods to Central America to the German Red Cross, which has extended the offer to European Red Cross Societies. The items have to be packed in 20" one-way containers. Please contact Mr. Ossowski at German RC, (00-49-228-541-1421).

### ***Belgian Red Cross***

Following an on-the-spot needs assessment with the Honduran RC and the Federation, the Belgian RC is funding 8,000 kitchen sets for distribution in Valle, Paraiso, Olancho and Choluteca through Honduran RC/ Federation. 2,000 cooking sets will be distributed in Cortes, Yoro, Atlántida and Colon through Honduran RC/Spanish RC. The Belgian RC will also supply 5,927 family parcels (food parcel with soap and water purification tablets) to the northern region through Honduran RC.

### ***American Red Cross***

Working in close collaboration with the Federation team, the American Red Cross is distributing food packages to 7,000 families in Choluteca, Valle, Olancho, el Paraiso and Morazan.

### ***Netherlands Red Cross***

Two members of the Netherlands Red Cross and a member of the Colombian Red Cross are visiting affected areas to identify community development projects. The NRC has also signed a MoU with the Honduran Red Cross to assist one of the chapters with basic infrastructure.

### ***Mexican Red Cross***

The Mexican Red Cross psychological support team worked for one week with volunteers from the National Honduran University. They laid down the basis for a post traumatic stress management programme.

## **NICARAGUA**

As previously reported, a Presidential decree requires all international humanitarian aid to be channeled through three NGOs: CARITAS, Lutheran Charities and the Nicaraguan Red Cross (NRC) .

Nicaraguan Red Cross volunteers have begun reconfirming recipient lists in all provinces. Distribution cards and forms for 30,000 families are being printed. First joint Federation/American RC food/ family parcel distributions got underway on December 13 with a distribution to 391 families in Tipitapa at which the Federation President, Dr. Heiberg, was present. This initial distribution is targeting 2,500 families this week and serves as a trial run for the larger-scale distributions to be undertaken in conjunction with WFP for an estimated 120,000 beneficiaries. American RC has provided 40 tons rice, 20 tons beans, 10 tons oil and salt. Federation has made an initial purchase of some 100 tons of maize, rice, beans, oats, oil, sugar, oil, salt and materials for kitchens sets.

The Federation team, in coordination with the NRC, is conducting a vehicle purchase and repair programme. The minimum requirements for the operation are 10 eight-ton all-wheel drive trucks and 2 UNIMOGs. The American RC, has purchased one 8-ton truck and an all terrain UNIMOG to support food distributions. An ARC logistics delegate has joined the team. Finnish RC is also supporting operation with the dispatch of seven Rubb Halls (10x24 metres) to serve as warehouses.

The NRC health services distributed 2 WHO kits and 16 cholera kits as of 9 December.

### ***Spanish Red Cross***

In coordination with the Federation, the Spanish RC has started food distributions in seven provinces. With ECHO funds, the Spanish RC plans to assist 7,400 families initially. The final target figures will be 10,000 families, or 60,000 people. The Society will also install 5 portable water purification plants and radio communications equipment. They have also helped the local chapters with rescue equipment and radio communications equipment. They have acquired four 8-ton trucks and 3 pick-up trucks.

The Society is also installing 15 mobile water treatment units with a capacity of 1,000 litres per hour each, concentrating in the north-west of Chinandega District, avoiding overlap with the German RC/Peruvian RC ERU team.

### ***American Red Cross***

ARC has expressed interest in supporting the acquisition and distribution of seeds and tools, in parallel with the food distribution to rural families. They will be distributed first in January in Central Nicaragua and then in May in the Pacific and Atlantic areas, corresponding to the respective rainy/main planting seasons.

### ***German Red Cross***

Under the umbrella of Federation activities, the Specialised Water ERU of the German RC/Peruvian RC is working in Chinandega district, about 1 km from the town of Villanueva and feeding 120,000 litres daily directly into the town's water supply, reducing tankering to a minimum. The ERU will undertake water quality surveillance at places where wells have been flooded and where the likelihood of contamination is high. (A full report on ERU deployments in Honduras and Nicaragua has been prepared by the Federation's Senior Officer for Water and Sanitation.)

This week, the German Red Cross ERU team expects to distribute 3,000 collapsible 20 lt. jerrycans to the 18,000 families to whom they supply clean water daily. The number of beneficiaries will increase in the next few weeks with the arrival of cistern tank trucks to assist in the water distribution to outer areas. Preparing for the departure of the Peruvian technicians, the water ERU team are training local Choluteca Chapter Red Cross volunteers in the technical aspects of ERU management.

### ***French Red Cross***

The French Red Cross has signed a MoU with the National Society to assist the Matagalpa Chapter with its radio-communications equipment and infrastructure. It distributed food, reinforced plastic sheeting and blankets to 150 needy families in the Matagalpa area.

## **EL SALVADOR**

The Salvadoran RC has finalised figures for the emergency phase: it rescued 2,309 people assisted 21,987 evacuees and, from 31 October to 15 November, distributed 13,548 food packages, 17,008 used clothing sets and 4,065 kitchen sets.

The Federation team has identified and verified beneficiaries in the areas assigned to it and will start food distributions next week. An all terrain pick-up truck has been purchased and volunteers of the chapters located close to the affected areas are beginning the repackaging of the food parcels. The plan is to distribute 5,400 family food packages in the following provinces: Ahuachapán, 691; Sonsonate 2,208; La Libertad, 293; and La Páz 2,208.

This NS has not received great quantities of in-kind donations. Nevertheless, the donations received are immediately distributed. Currently in their warehouse there is only used clothing and water remaining.

The Spanish RC will distribute food packages to 50,000 families in the eastern part of the country while the Federation will cover the western part, close to the border with Guatemala. Additionally, they will distribute 16,600 hygiene sets, 7,600 dish sets, and 16,600 food packages containing maize, rice, beans, sugar, salt, cooking oil and powdered milk. The SRC has purchased one two-ton truck and three 8-ton trucks for food distributions, the first of which began this week in the Departments of La Unión

and Usulután. The radio equipment donated by the Spanish RC is being installed. Two pick-up trucks, also donated by this PNS, are to be utilized for their distributions.

With the initial transfer of funds by the Federation, the NS has purchased a third pick-up truck, a fax machine and raincoats for the volunteers.

Both the Spanish RC and the Federation are proceeding cautiously with the food distribution trying to keep their distance from electorally oriented distributions. The country will soon hold federal elections and many candidates from all parties are trying to win votes by distributing goods to the victims of the disaster.

## **GUATEMALA**

The Federation team is running a programme for Street Children in a peripheral urban area of Guatemala City where many people lost their homes and all their belongings.

The Guatemala Red Cross continues to distribute food to shelters and to send medical brigades to most affected areas of the country where volunteer doctors provide free medical attention. Currently, three medical brigades are treating 2,000 people. The most prevalent diseases are skin and gastrointestinal infections. The teams are also monitoring wells, and supplying chlorine tablets to families in the region.

During the mission of a DWI (Disasters Welfare Inquiries) volunteer from the Mexican Red Cross, 42 requests were received and 18 were resolved. Twenty five women volunteers were trained and will continue the programme.

### ***Spanish Red Cross***

The Federation delegate and the Spanish Red Cross delegates have been in close contact regarding food distributions. They are sharing price information and co-ordinating the logistics of all future distributions.

## ***Outstanding needs***

### **Transitional appeal**

The present relief operation needs to be extended until the beginning of the next harvest, in May/June 1999. A transitional relief appeal is being prepared and will be released in the next few days. It will broaden the relief programme to include food for aid and food for work schemes, the provision of seeds and tools, medical assistance to counter the spread of epidemics, and assistance with housing reconstruction and shelter. Donors are asked to continue giving their support to the co-ordination of relief efforts.

### **Co-ordination of deliveries**

The Federation team is still struggling with the difficulties caused by unannounced and undocumented shipments of relief goods from National Societies and other sources. Donors are reminded, once again, that if they want to avoid delays in getting their goods released from customs, they must advise the Federation delegation beforehand of the cargo's arrival and supply all necessary documentation. This will enable the Federation coordination team to prepare customs procedures and organise personnel for loading and unloading manoeuvres.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The International Federation was the only non-government agency present at the IADB meeting on Reconstruction and Transformation in Central America on 10-11 December and was represented by Mr. Santiago Gil, Director, Americas Department, and Mr. Peter Walker, Director, Disaster Policy. The Federation made two interventions at the meeting on the issue of aid co-ordination at regional and

national level and provided an explanation of the Federation's present and future programming in the region. A number of donors supported the Federation's call for aid co-ordination to go beyond the governmental sector to include civil society and specifically the Red Cross. There was also a lot of emphasis on local capacity building, specifically citing work through the Red Cross.

Participating NS have been informed that a longer-term and much more ambitious Framework for Rehabilitation is being considered to provide a coherent framework that provides direction and structure to the work of the Federation in all countries affected by Mitch. The programme combines three complementary approaches to rehabilitation, one community-based, one National Society-based and one looking at necessary management systems in order to facilitate co-operation between ONS and PNS and for developing common norms.

In the region, the Federation is engaged in intensive discussions with WFP about food distributions over the next six months. These are being carried on at regional and country level. Close contact is also maintained with other UN agencies, particularly PAHO, and Government bodies.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The Federation has been working closely with the ONS and the PNS since the onset of the crisis, to ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable victims of this natural disaster quickly and effectively, without wasted effort. Although the response so far has been outstanding, relief needs remain enormous and continued financial support is needed in order to address them effectively. Donors are urged to respond generously to the transitional appeal that will be released shortly.

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