

CENTRAL AMERICA: HURRICANE MITCH TRANSITIONAL RELIEF AND FIRST PHASE REHABILITATION

20 October 1999

SPECIAL REPORT: UPDATE AND FOCUS ON REGIONAL FLOODING

appeal no. 02/99

situation report no. 3

period covered: 1 August to 20 October 1999

The relief phase of the Hurricane Mitch operation is now over, however, current flooding in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica is giving rise to serious humanitarian concerns which must be addressed as part of the post emergency response and ongoing support as envisioned and detailed through this Transitional Appeal. The International Federation is asking donors for support to increase the current appeal coverage and thus enable these urgent new needs to be met.

The context

This Appeal sought funding for six months support to meet the ongoing post-emergency needs of people left displaced due to the effects of Hurricane *Mitch*. Particular concern was focused on the much greater degree of vulnerability that Hurricane *Mitch* has left these countries in, more especially the serious risks these populations would face in what was predicted to be a potentially punishing hurricane season in 1999. Regrettably this has proven to be the case. Severe floods in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica following unusually heavy seasonal tropical storms struck the region and continue to have more serious impact due to the still severely degraded core infrastructure of many countries and the added vulnerability of the displaced populations. For more details, please refer to *Central Americas: Floods and Landslides* Information Bulletins 1 to 4 issued during October.

In the meantime rehabilitation activities continue, however, over the past six months it has become clear that the post-disaster situation has aggravated both the difficulties and the long term consequences. Increased unemployment, higher priced foodstuffs, reduced access to health care, migration to already overburdened cities and the loss of homes have resulted in additional uncontrolled settlement on highly unstable, landslide-prone ridges and slopes and in dangerous river valleys, that are now seriously impacted by the current storms.

A Federation assessment team stated in December 1998: "The situation is likely to get worse, not better". Sadly, this has been confirmed. Over the past few months, the Federation delegations in consultation with Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies have noted the following observations in relation to the Appeal.

- { While the acute emergency phase is well over, pockets of remote and vulnerable groups remain and require ongoing relief. Vulnerable groups, primarily those left homeless, have increased needs. As the move to provide permanent housing has been hampered by legal, social and land tenure complexities, the living, social, health, education, and employment conditions all suffer. These ongoing transitional needs are likely to continue well into next year. Whilst the Federation's Agricultural Support programme, funded and supported by the British Red Cross, proved highly appropriate the deteriorating situation in agriculture, particularly in Nicaragua and Honduras, may well require additional assistance along these lines.
- { The original essential need for food distributions both in the rural areas and to a lesser extent in the shelters is no longer necessary. *However, newly displaced populations due to the current widespread flooding will require additional food support and as the Operating National Societies (ONS) have been asked to take on additional shelter responsibilities, the need for emergency relief items such as blankets, plastic sheeting, water containers and, medicines will increase as a result.*
- { The need to implement the Disaster Preparedness and Response and Institutional Development components of the Appeal are a priority for the next three months.
- { The main operational targets of the Appeal, specifically providing of food and relief materials, temporary shelters, and rehabilitation activities have, in large part, been undertaken by the Spanish, American, German, Netherlands, Belgium, and French Red Cross Societies on a bilateral basis. The Federation has concentrated on co-ordination and monitoring of distributions, water and sanitation, disaster preparedness, capacity building and training activities.

Latest events

Food distributions have been completed with the exception of those carried out in support of temporary collective shelters. However, heavy downpours in September and October have had a serious impact in the region. El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras continue to be pounded by heavy storms and torrential rain. Heading into the final two months of this year's hurricane season there are already many casualties and displaced populations being assisted by the respective ONS and the Federation with ongoing rescue and evacuation activities, the establishment and management of shelters, feeding, and provision of basic first aid and health support.

	Honduras	Nicaragua	Guatemala	El Salvador	Costa Rica*	Totals
Evacuated	15,516	1,563	3,740	4,567	2,962	26,065
Fatalities	28	19	12	7	9	75
Destroyed or Damage	32 bridges/21 roads/1300 homes	3 bridges/34 roads/294 homes	780 homes	3 bridges	12 bridges/300 km roads	50 bridges/ 55 roads & 300 km /2374 homes

***a transfer of CHF 50,000 from DREF has already been made to Costa Rica.**

National Governments have problems relocating people who are living in extremely risky areas. In some countries the authorities have passed laws that oblige municipalities to evacuate high risk areas and demolish buildings ruined by Hurricane *Mitch*. The people living in these areas, however, usually refuse to leave their homes until they have been guaranteed new places to live and it is these populations that have been most hit by the ongoing flooding. This situation has given rise to the considerable concern, namely the inability to identify, purchase and transfer land to agencies in order to commence

construction. The Red Cross has accepted a major role in this field and in most countries their projects and progress has been hampered or even brought to a halt.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Federation and Participating National Societies (including the American, Spanish, French, Canadian, German, and Netherlands Red Cross) have provided vehicles, food packages, hygiene materials, blankets, plastic sheeting and water containers to the ONS. However, the logistics and material resources to address these needs are now under severe pressure and additional assistance is required.

Specifically, ongoing support for existing temporary shelters must continue for some time. During this period of reconstruction and rehabilitation, Red Cross programs will focus on the construction and repairing of houses and schools in addition to water, sanitation and agricultural rehabilitation activities.

The distribution of shelter materials, food, relief supplies, basic medicines and other essentials is needed to meet the needs of those displaced by last year's hurricane and new victims from the current flooding.

More emphasis is also needed on disaster preparedness (DP) in the form of education for the community and ONS volunteers, DP capacity building for the headquarters and branches, preparation of emergency food supplies, pre-positioning of emergency items and purchasing of emergency rescue items for the ONS response teams.

There is an overall need for regional and country based training and information activities.

Outstanding needs

Priorities for the coming months include:

- { flood emergency relief response and rehabilitation.
- { DP and response - including contingency planning, implementation, pre-positioning of emergency supplies and equipment; DP training courses and workshops at headquarters, branch and community levels; regional communication network assessment mission. There is a real need to strengthen the capacity of the Red Cross to co-operate with international systems and institutions in the identification and implementation of early warning and emergency planning initiatives.
- { temporary shelter; construction and management (additional needs for temporary construction are arising as flood victim numbers increase and as permanent land sites are identified);
- { permanent housing construction;
- { water/sanitation and health in existing projects and shelters under construction and in remote areas which have not yet been assisted; funding and implementation of community health project in the Golfo de Fonseca.
- { institutional development and capacity building (complete work underway to repair and rehabilitate ONS physical structures; support the ONS operational capacity, structures and training, particularly in the headquarters; reinforce regional and country delegations' ID capacity in human resources and programme funding).

The outstanding pledges to this Appeal have either audit or reporting requirements prior to release of funds for use. **There is now an urgent need to release any remaining uncommitted funds which in turn will allow the Federation to immediately respond to the current needs due to the flooding and**

to reinforce the ongoing activities of the ONS. These funds are also needed during the coming months to improve cash flow for emergency response and to continue ongoing DPP/ID projects.

Cash transfers are needed to complete pre-positioning of resources for emergencies and DPP Training and for provision of immediate support to ONS in emergency response air/land transport, vehicle rentals, reinforcing warehouse capacity and for the procurement of relief supplies for flood relief plans.

There is also a need to review and reinforce likely longer term ONS responsibilities in the temporary shelters (*macroalberguas*) particularly in the health/social sector.

Experienced Institutional Developments delegates (2) need to be identified for the Regional and Honduras Delegations.

Country	Summary of Targeted no. of families	Summary of essential relief needs for current floods	Food Packs	Jerry cans/water purific. tabs	Blankets	Plastic Sheeting	Hygiene Kits	Kitchen sets
Nicaragua	5,220	5,220	5,220	15,660	365x 6x4 m2	98,964	5,220	
Honduras	2,500	2,500	2,500	7,300	180x 6x4 m2	50,000	2,500	
El Salvador	500	500	500	1,500		9,000	500	
Guatemala	300	300	300	1,000		1,000	300	
Costa Rica	Assessment currently underway							
TOTALS	8,520	8,520	8,520	25,460	545 x 6m2	158,964	8,520	

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Close contact is maintained with government departments particularly through the ONS officers involved in the flooding alerts. The Federation Delegations are co-ordinating with the appropriate PNS contacts with ECHO, OFDA for ongoing funding support, as well as the UN.

A video has been made by the Federation to compliment other PNS anniversary memorials of the hurricane. ***Mitch: A New Awareness*** will be released on 27 October at the International Conference in Geneva one year to the day after the start of the disaster. It will be accompanied in Central America by a series of press conferences, photo displays and other activities carried out by both the ONS, PNS and the Federation.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The consequences of the flooding which has occurred this past month can only reinforce the core priority of increasing efforts in the areas of disaster preparedness and response. The next priority rests with the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation of destroyed villages, houses, schools, clinics and

social facilities. The main hurdle to cross in achieving this is the need for government to either procure building land or enable others to do so in a legal and secure manner. In line with this is the need to provide clean water and sanitation facilities both in the temporary shelters and the permanent housing being built.

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