

# CUBA

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

**CHF 1,507,000**

**Programme No. 01.23/98**

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In 1997, the Cuban Red Cross (CRC) continued to be operational in the wake of Hurricane Lili, reaching large numbers of beneficiaries through relief and rehabilitation programmes. It was also a period when the image of the institution was greatly strengthened through a public awareness campaign. In addition, the CRC continued to serve the public through a broad range of services including its very successful lifeguard programme, health services, including HIV/AIDS prevention, and an ambulance service.

Cuba continues to suffer the effects of the longest embargo in modern times as a result of restrictions imposed by the US Government in 1961. Trade restrictions were further tightened in 1996 with the introduction of the Helms-Burton Act directed against foreign companies that do business with Cuba. Evidence indicates that the embargo is impeding access to essential humanitarian goods; specifically, it has raised the costs of medical supplies and food. Since Cuba entered the so-called “special period” following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in 1989, it has experienced a 60% decline in its gross domestic product.

### *Red Cross Action in 1997*

Since March 1993, when the Cuban Red Cross — for the first time in many years — requested the International Federation to launch an appeal on its behalf, there has been a noticeable strengthening in the links between the NS and the Kingston Regional Delegation. The largest Federation-supported relief operation carried out to date in Cuba was completed in 1997 in response to Hurricane Lili which hit the country with devastating force in October, 1996. The Red Cross was involved in general food and other distributions to some 30,000 beneficiaries; about 45,000 people benefited from improvements to the water supply; and 828 families were able to rebuild their homes.

The capacity of the CRC to assist other NSs in the region was demonstrated in 1997 during the Red Cross airlift of some 300 children from the volcano-affected island of Montserrat. The National Society organised a summer camp involving psychological support and medical check-ups for 42 children. It is also exporting its training expertise in water safety to the St. Vincent and Grenadines Red Cross Society.

Following the rehabilitation phase of Hurricane Lili, the CRC and the Regional Delegation embarked on a series of measures designed to support capacity-building in the Society. These included a workshop on management attended by HQ senior management and Provincial Secretary Generals.

A carefully crafted programme to boost the image, action and presence of the CRC was drafted by the NS and the Regional Delegation. It seeks to ensure better public awareness of the role and activities of the NS; ensure better public support and participation in Red Cross activities; improve the response capacity of the NS; and put in place a communications strategy.

This programme comes at a time when the NS is growing increasingly independent of Government, as indicated by the progressive separation of the CRC ambulance service from that of the Ministry of Health. Only Red Cross ambulances will be allowed to use the emblem. The NS also anticipates Central Government approval for it to have its own budget and staff, separate from the Ministry of Health, thereby strengthening its image as an organisation with a separate and distinct identity.

All these measures and activities opened the door to a Co-operation Agreement between the NS and the International Federation. This agreement has to be developed by a yearly plan of action. The first annual plan of action in 1998 will seek to review the current level of development of the Cuban RC; establish priorities in terms of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable; support human resource development; achieve further integration with the rest of the region, through information and personnel exchange; and provide long-term institutional development support.

## *Objectives in 1998*

- | To ensure the overall disaster preparedness and response capacity of the Cuban Red Cross;
- | to develop further the Youth Red Cross network and ensure integration in other key programme areas;
- | to provide targeted support to branch development and improve NS capacity at community level;
- | to raise public awareness about the distinct identity and scope of action of the CRC.

## *Plan of Action*

### **Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Programme**

Integrated in the regional disaster preparedness programme co-ordinated by the Regional Delegation, the Cuban Red Cross will implement this programme, composed of three different but complementary components: training, logistics and radio-communications. It includes targeting specific vulnerable communities at proven risk to disasters; organisation of motivational workshops; training of facilitators to work at community level; and hazard mapping. The response capacity of the NS will be further strengthened through improvements to its radio-communications network (already underway as a result of Hurricane Lili) and logistics support. An important element of overall disaster preparedness measures in Cuba is the Red Cross lifeguard programme which saves hundreds of lives each year. This programme is presently seriously under-resourced.

### **Branch Development Programme**

The Cuban Red Cross has probably the largest constituency of all the Caribbean NS, thanks to its 169 municipal and 14 provincial committees. Most of them have a basic infrastructure and membership sufficient to develop worthwhile activities in favour of the most vulnerable groups but are hindered by a number of major factors that block the capacity-building of the NS: a lack of resources and

infrastructure; weak disaster response capacity; lack of training and human resources development; and lack of communication with NS HQ. This programme seeks to carry out a feasibility study of the current situation of the branches, especially at provincial level, in a first phase, holding a series of meeting/workshops with committees' staff and management. A two-year branch development plan would then be established, including a plan for human resource training.

### **Youth Red Cross Development Programme**

The Cuban Youth Red Cross has a strong constituency and social base. Yet despite having one of the largest memberships in the Caribbean, it suffers from a lack of equipment and financial resources which would allow it to play a fuller role in the life of the NS and its programmes. The main aims of this programme are to train youth leaders in project planning and micro-management; to reinforce the youth at provincial and local level and promote their active participation in services such as HIV/STD prevention, first aid and disaster preparedness.

### **Institutional Image Programme**

As a continuation of the Institutional Image project which got underway in 1997 after Hurricane Lili, the Cuban Red Cross needs to carry out a project on institutional image and visibility among the general public. This project is especially relevant to reinforce the unique identity of the Red Cross in relation with the governmental institutions of the country. It will seek to increase Red Cross visibility through better promotion of its presence and actions at national, provincial and community level. This will permit the development of a broad-based, publicity-cum-dissemination campaign to bring key messages home to the public through use of diverse media including radio, TV, press, posters etc. Existing activities such as the lifeguard programme will be specially promoted as Red Cross programmes and co-operation with the ICRC International Humanitarian Law dissemination centre in Havana will continue.