

CENTRAL AMERICA, COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA AND MEXICO: HURRICANES CESAR AND DOUGLAS

**Preliminary Appeal no:
11/96**

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS CHF 390,260
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 11,175 BENEFICIARIES FOR 3 MONTHS***

Summary

On 26 July, a Tropical Depression formed in the Caribbean which first affected Colombia, Venezuela and Panama. It then turned into a hurricane-force storm — Hurricane Cesar — that swept over land in Nicaragua causing widespread damage whilst also dumping torrential rains on the already-flooded Costa Rica. Twenty-eight people are reported to have been killed by the floods in Costa Rica with another 30 still missing. ‘Cesar’ weakened as it crossed Nicaragua, but when it reached the Pacific Coast it strengthened and -- now named Hurricane Douglas -- swept north into Mexico before heading west into the Pacific Ocean where it is slowly diminishing. The depression also provoked heavy rains across El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

The Red Cross Societies of Venezuela, Colombia and Panama have been able to cope so far with the effects of the floods by utilising their own resources. However, in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, thousands of families had to be evacuated and took refuge in temporary shelters — only to return to find their homes destroyed and crops flooded.

The Intended Operation

In responding to the disaster, the Nicaraguan Red Cross immediately carried out a disaster assessment and has swiftly drawn up operational plans which, if supported, will allow it to assist 11,175 persons with food, blankets, clothing and water containers for a period of three months in four of the worst-hit departments of the country.

It has not yet been possible for the Costa Rican Red Cross Society to make a detailed survey and formulate a plan of action to the Federation. However, this is expected soon. In the meantime, the

Federation's Regional Delegation in San José, Costa Rica, is in daily contact with the Societies in the region and will inform the Geneva Secretariat if further assistance is necessary.

The Disaster

Nicaragua •

On 27 July 1996 at 11:30 pm (local time), Hurricane Cesar crossed land in Nicaragua, 40 kilometres north of Bluefields producing winds of 150 km/hour. It left a trail of destruction in its wake as roads, bridges and other public infrastructure, crops and local forests were badly damaged. A total of 2,905 homes were destroyed — principally in the departments of Zelaya, Chontales, Soaco, Matagalpa, Managua, Leon, and Chinandega — with 24,000 persons (4,177 families) being severely affected. Over 27,000 persons were evacuated and 7,240 persons given temporary shelter.

As the hurricane crossed Nicaragua, it was downgraded to the level of a Tropical Storm, but when it arrived at the Pacific Ocean it picked up force and was renamed Hurricane Douglas and swept through the Pacific coastal areas of Central America and Mexico.

Costa Rica •

The same Hurricane Cesar seriously affected Costa Rica. High winds and torrential rain began on 26 July and continued for two days, particularly affecting the cantons of Acosta, Pérez Zeledón, Buenos Aires, Osa, Golfito, Coto Brus, Corredor, Lepanto, Paraíso, Parrita, Tarrazu, Aguirre and Dota. So far, 28 persons are confirmed dead and 30 are still missing. Approximately 6,000 persons were evacuated and 2,921 persons given shelter in 24 specially-opened facilities. Current estimates are that 3,000 homes have been partially or totally destroyed by the hurricane, though exact data is impossible to collate because many roads have become impassable and 42 bridges destroyed.

The Response so far

Nicaragua •

The Nicaraguan Red Cross (NRC) initiated prevention measures during the hours before Hurricane Cesar touched land by warning the population. The National Society also activated its Emergency Plan in coordination with the government and other organisations. Altogether, 981 NRC volunteers and all 569 staff members participated in the search, rescue and evacuation operations.

Costa Rica •

Immediately on learning of the approach of the storm, the Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC) and the government alerted the population and began evacuation measures. National Society staff and volunteers participated in the search and rescue efforts, the transportation of victims to medical facilities and in family tracing. CRRC specially-trained teams rescued people from tree tops and flooded homes. Landslides and flash flooding seriously hampered their efforts, so that some areas are still cut off due to damaged roads and bridges.

National Society/Federation Plans of Action

Nicaragua •

The Nicaraguan Red Cross plans to assist 2,235 families, or 56% of the most severely-affected victims of the floods in the departments of Leon, Chinandega, Rivas and Zelaya. It intends to provide them with food for three months along with distributions of family food baskets, blankets, clothing and water containers. Volunteers will be supplied with rubber boots and rain gear when necessary.

The Society has made a national appeal and the response has been good, but far from sufficient. In addition, the Spanish Red Cross has made available CHF 12,500 for the beginning of the operation and the Federation will provide an advance from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), so that relief activities can begin immediately.

Budget

	CHF
Food (rice, beans, flour, sugar, salt and oil)	282,560
Transport and Warehousing	18,750
Vehicles and repair	16,250
Local Personnel	15,000
Volunteer transport, information, communications	8,700
Administration and reporting	6,250
Training	3,750
Rescue equipment, rain gear, boots, packaging	15,000
Delegates and Federation Expenses	24,000
Total	390,260

Costa Rica ●

The National Society is still using its own funds and money raised following a national appeal for the emergency assistance to hurricane victims . However, the government of Costa Rica is appealing for international assistance and details of the National Society’s separate appeal will be sent to donors as soon as a more definite plan of action has been drawn up and sent to the Federation.

International Federation Action

The International Federation has already made CHF 50,000 available for this appeal from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund. The Regional Delegation in San José, Costa Rica is working closely with the region's National Societies in order to formulate plans of action. A delegate from the German Red Cross and one from the Spanish Red Cross have also been sent to assist. The German Red Cross is conducting a survey of damage to homes and will submit a request to ECHO for CHF 355,000 for Nicaragua.

Conclusion

Additional requests are expected from the disaster areas in the next few days, so this preliminary appeal will be revised accordingly. So far, the Spanish Red Cross has made an initial donation of CHF 25,000 and the German Red Cross one of CHF 135,000.

A rapid and generous response to this preliminary appeal will allow disaster relief action to continue effectively in the worst-hit areas. Donors are urged to pledge cash to the Federation in Geneva, as all relief goods needed are available locally or in the region.

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