

CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO: HURRICANE MITCH

**Revised appeal
no: 33/98
04 November 1998**

***THIS REVISED APPEAL SEEKS
CHF 12,570,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES TO ASSIST
180,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR 3 MONTHS***

*La traduction française de cet appel est en préparation
La traducción en español de este llamamiento está en preparación
The translation of this Appeal into Arabic is under preparation*

Summary

Hurricane Mitch has literally devastated Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and hit Panama, Costa Rica and Belize with recurrent violent winds and lashing rain. Since 22nd October, this tropical storm has affected an estimated 5 million people region-wide, of whom at least 2.5 million are now struggling to survive. Latest estimations of total numbers of dead indicate that at least 6,500 people have perished. Reports talk about 10,000 missing people as a result of flooding, mud slides or being isolated in remote areas which rescue teams are not able to access. The losses in terms of infrastructure are enormous with most of the key access roads completely damaged, bridges destroyed and thousands of houses collapsed. The loss of crops is dramatic and will threaten basic local food supplies for the next three months.

A preliminary appeal for CHF 3,200,000 was issued on 30th October 1998 which is replaced by this full Appeal for CHF 12,570,000.

For the past two weeks, National Red Cross Societies throughout the region have been engaged in a wide variety of disaster response activities including issuing warnings, media alerts, rescue of victims, organising evacuations, carrying out damage and needs assessments, feeding the homeless and distributing emergency relief in more than 500 shelters which have been set up. Despite the extensive damage to transport and communications systems and ongoing extreme weather conditions, over 8,000 Red Cross volunteers region-wide are committed to saving the lives of the population in need. The International Federation has been monitoring the situation, guiding the process of assessing the needs, channelling information and co-ordinating the arrival of relief support both in human resources and cash to the affected areas.

The immediate urgency is to respond to the emergency needs of 36,300 most vulnerable families throughout the region. In-depth needs assessments continue to be carried out, confirming that it is

essential to provide food, blankets, kitchen utensils, hygiene kits, medicines and chlorine urgently to ensure survival for the next three months.

The Disaster

Tropical storm Mitch, the most devastating storm reported in the region in the past century, upgraded on Monday 26th October to a Category 5 hurricane with sustained winds of 170 mph., has been causing recurrent and heavy rains with consequent floods and mud slides in all Central American countries. Although initial forecasts had predicted that Hurricane Mitch would head towards the Mexican Atlantic coasts and Cuba, it remained stationary over the Honduras islands and finally cut through the country's northern coasts on Thursday 29th October. Downgraded again to a tropical Storm, Mitch broke into the Honduras inland and unexpectedly followed its trajectory towards Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. In all of these countries it is still not possible to measure the magnitude of the disaster. Rescue, evacuation and relief distribution activities continue day and night in an attempt to ensure that no more people lose their lives. As for the medium and long term consequences in these already weakened economies, these will no doubt be far-reaching and dramatic.

Honduras, considered as one of the worst hit countries in the region, has seen around 85% of its territory under water. Latest reports indicate that the number of deaths has risen to 5,000 while two million people are suffering the direct consequences of wind-whipped waves, floods, mud slides, electricity cuts, destroyed bridges and roads and the loss of around 75% of agricultural products. The number of evacuees has increased to around 230,000 persons who are living in or around 190 temporary shelters. However, both the authorities and aid organisations are still evaluating the needs which have exceeded all predictions.

The most critically hit areas, besides the Islands of La Bahía, are the Northern departments of Atlántida, Colón, Yoro, Choluteca, Santa Barbara and Gracia de Dios, as well as the Eastern departments where the capital, Tegucigalpa, is totally devastated and has lost all communications with the rest of the country.

At least half of the **Nicaraguan** territory has been reported as severely hit with an estimated 1,300 deaths, 500,000 affected and evacuees seeking refuge in 200 shelters. The loss of basic infrastructure such as roads and bridges is also significant. The Northern departments of Chinandega, Chichigalpa, León, Matagalpa, Esteli, Madrid, Nueva Segovia and Jinotega as well as Granada and Rivas in the South are known to be in a particularly critical situation. The terrifying mud slide from the slopes of the volcano Casitas, located in the municipality of Posoltega, buried entire communities and brought home vividly to both local authorities and aid organisations the magnitude of the disaster.

In **El Salvador** the storm has unexpectedly devastated wide reaches of the country especially in the Eastern departments which border Nicaragua, such as La Unión, San Miguel, San Vicente y Uzulután. The islands of El Golfo de Fonseca have also reported a situation of extreme emergency for its more than 10,000 inhabitants. Estimated deaths have now reached 350, with more than 100,000 persons affected. Destroyed bridges and damaged roads prevent access to some of the most affected areas. The latest report indicates that 345 mud slides have occurred which puts the lives of many people in great danger, particularly in the Eastern part of the country where at least 100 families in the municipality of Baja Lempa are known to be isolated. The number of evacuees has risen to around 45,000 people who are located in some 300 shelters.

In **Guatemala**, which was the last country on the path of Tropical Storm Mitch, rain has not ceased for the last 72 hours as we issue this Appeal. In the North Atlantic departments of Izabal, Zacapa and Alta Verapaz, the first effects of the storm left enormous damage as it moved along towards the Pacific

coasts devastating entire areas such as Retalhuleo, Escuintla, Mazatenango and the suburbs of Guatemala City. The death toll reported in Guatemala to date is of 100 people. 50,000 persons are reported to be severely affected and more than 28,000 have found protection in shelters. The damage to

main roads has also left the capital with almost no communication with the rest of the affected areas where many communities are known to be isolated.

In **Costa Rica**, where the storm Mitch made its first appearance, three persons were reported dead and more than 1,000 were evacuated in the province of Guanacaste (in the Northern Pacific area bordering Nicaragua). The National Emergency Commission maintained a general alert for several days until the danger finally ceased. The strong rains reported in the region left a total of 15,000 persons affected with countless houses and crops destroyed.

The situation in **Panama** started worsening on Thursday 22nd October with the first effects of strong winds and rains that caused severe flooding in the provinces of Darién, Veraguas, Los Santos and Chiriqui, leaving more than 7,500 affected people.

In **Belize**, most of the 75,000 residents of coastal Belize city left on Tuesday 27th October turning the largest city into a ghost town. The threat of Hurricane Mitch and its initial strong rains in the coastal areas obliged the authorities to issue an alert. The Cayes were affected with floods and beach erosions. An estimated 60,000 persons were sheltered for 4 days in temporary refuges where almost no food and relief items were available.

The Response so far

Government Action w

Governments in all the affected countries have declared the whole country or certain regions to be in a state of emergency as the effects of the Storm increased. In Honduras the authorities announced a 15 day curfew from 9:00 pm to 5:00 am. All efforts have been made to co-ordinate with relief organisations such as the Red Cross in order to carry out the best possible emergency operations. Air forces in all countries have contributed to the rescue activities with human resources, heavy vehicles and helicopters.

Appeals seeking support both locally and from the international community have been launched in almost all the countries.

Red Cross Action w

In **Honduras**, since Sunday 25th October, all Red Cross branches throughout the country have participated in rescue, evacuation, distribution of relief items and first aid assistance in all the affected areas with a total of 3,000 volunteers. The Headquarters in Tegucigalpa was flooded and re-located, as was the case for the local branches of La Ceiba and Tocoa. The Red Cross Society is co-ordinating all activities with the local authorities and the Permanent Contingency Commission which is providing vehicles and health assistance. As the alert began, the National Society launched impressive public information campaigns through local media in order to advise the population of preparedness measures in view of the imminent dangers. At present, as a result of efforts deployed during the emergency, the Honduran Red Cross has reported that its volunteers are showing signs of exhaustion. National Society warehouses have been completely emptied and there is an urgent need of assistance to purchase relief items. An assessment of needs has been prepared which concludes that 12,000 families are in need of urgent assistance.

The **Nicaraguan Red Cross** has launched a national appeal and opened its headquarters in Managua to receive local donations. Information campaigns have been set up to improve the population's awareness of the ongoing emergency situation. Relief efforts have focused on rescue, evacuation and transportation of relief items to the most seriously affected and remote areas. Red Cross teams have been present in the Posoltega area in co-ordination with firemen and other rescue organisations, in order

to come to the rescue of persons affected by the volcano Casitas mud slide. Currently, the Red Cross is working in 96 temporary shelters. An in-depth assessment of needs has been prepared concluding that 7,500 families are in need of urgent assistance.

The Red Cross in **El Salvador** started its relief operation by sending a 20 member team with medicines to support neighbouring Honduras. Rescue and evacuation activities are continuing around the clock. Some 3,000 volunteers are distributing relief items both in shelters and in homes where people have decided to stay. A national appeal was launched and donations are arriving at the Headquarters in San Salvador where aid is organised and distributed immediately to shelters. The most urgent needs are to assist 5,400 families with basic items to survive the prolonged emergency phase.

The Red Cross in **Guatemala** has been operating for 5 days in the north Atlantic departments assisting with rescue activities and evacuation. Distribution of relief items to shelters is carried out throughout the country and 7 shelters are being established in Guatemala City. A national appeal was launched and donations from individuals are being collected at the Red Cross headquarters where they are sorted and where distribution throughout the country is organised. The immediate needs are to provide relief assistance to 4,500 families.

The Red Cross in **Costa Rica** has involved its 18 local branches in the region of Guanacaste in evacuation and rescue activities in co-ordination with the local Emergency Committees. More than 350 Red Cross volunteers are still working in the area and thanks to the response received to a national appeal, some relief items were stored and will soon be distributed. The immediate needs for the emergency are food, water, hygiene kits and clothes for 3,000 families.

The Red Cross in **Panama** has worked in the affected areas, particularly in the province of Darién. The local branches in Puerto Armuelles and Veraguas are distributing food, water, clothes and medicines. The current priority is to bring relief to 1,500 families.

The **Belize** Red Cross has mobilised volunteers to assist in the management of temporary shelters. The Red Cross clinic in Belmopan has been opened to deal with first aid and primary care. However, food and other relief materials are urgently needed to assist 2,400 families.

Co-ordination w

The Regional Delegation in Guatemala is co-ordinating initiatives with all the affected National Societies and has maintained contact with other organisations and potential donors such as WHO/OPS, OFDA, Doctors without Borders (Médicos sin Fronteras) and ECHO's regional office in Guatemala.

The Intended Operation

Emergency Phase •

The National Societies involved foresee provision of basic items such as food, blankets, kitchen utensils, drinking water, hygiene kits, chlorine and medicines to the most vulnerable to guarantee survival over the next 3 months.

After an assessment of needs and taking into account both the National Societies' capacity and the efforts made by other relief agencies, each National Society seeks to assist the following number of families:

Honduras: 12,000
Nicaragua: 7,500
El Salvador: 5,400
Guatemala: 4,500
Costa Rica: 3,000
Panama: 1,500
Belize: 2,400

Red Cross objectives •

- to act as auxiliaries to the public authorities during the evacuation/emergency phase;

- to continue first aid and medical support to the evacuees in shelters;
- to support feeding programmes for the homeless;
- to ensure supplies of drinking water;
- to provide emergency shelter as well as clothing and blankets;
- to support longer-term rehabilitation needs such as repairs to housing.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency phase •

The International Federation and its member National Societies continue to respond to the emergency. The Regional Delegation maintains constant contact with the National Societies, assisting in the evaluation of needs and following up on any further requests for assistance.

Human resources have been co-ordinated and the Mexican Red Cross is sending a 12 member team to Honduras and a 10 member team to Nicaragua where the Red Cross in Costa Rica is also sending a 20 member team.

A total of CHF 400,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) was immediately released by the International Federation to assist the countries in need. The Colombian Red Cross has donated USD 3,000 for Honduras and the same sum for Nicaragua, and the Spanish Red Cross has released over USD 55,000. National campaigns to raise funds for the region have been launched in Belgium, Canada, Holland, Spain, Sweden and the United States of America through the respective Red Cross Societies.

Delegates will be recruited to support the Regional Delegation whilst two further Federation delegates will soon travel to Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador in order to support the National Societies in their current efforts.

Tracing

At present, requests for tracing can be accepted only by the Red Cross Society of Panama and the Costa Rican Red Cross.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Hurricane Mitch is not yet over. It is an ongoing disaster for the people in Central America. This revised appeal is being launched to support the continuing efforts of National Societies throughout the region in meeting the humanitarian demands placed on them by this unique weather system which continues to cause widespread destruction. Donors are urged to respond promptly to this Appeal in order to allow the Red Cross to capitalise fully on preparedness measures already in place and to continue implementation of relief activities to relieve the suffering of those who have lost their homes and livelihood.

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