



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY  
Agenda item 17

A53/INF.DOC./7  
19 May 2000

---

## **Report on the support provided by PAHO/WHO for the reconstruction and transformation process in Central America following Hurricane Mitch**

**Submitted to the World Health Assembly for information**

1. PAHO responded to the needs of the countries affected by Hurricane Mitch with an intensified programme of work in order to reduce the impact of the Hurricane on the health of the peoples of Central America. This tragedy caused the death or disappearance of some 20 000 people and a still greater number were injured. It is estimated that about 30% of the health facilities were damaged. In particular, the worst affected countries, Nicaragua and Honduras, and to a lesser extent El Salvador and Guatemala, received immediate support from PAHO through the mobilization of technical and financial resources. Some 60 professionals were dispatched immediately to the subregion to provide support in the tasks of rescue and the rehabilitation of basic services which had been damaged or totally destroyed. These professional staff were in addition to the approximately 150 staff that PAHO maintains in the country offices of the subregion. An amount of US\$ 300 000 was immediately allocated by PAHO from the Regional Director's Development Programme in response to the emergency and a further US\$ 1.5 million was allocated for cholera control activities in response to the Declaration of Ministers of Health Meeting in Costa del Sol, El Salvador in December 1998.
2. Mexico, Cuba and other countries of the hemisphere responded to the emergency by providing massive support in the form of human and financial resources, in a broad spirit of panamericanism.
3. Appeals for support addressed to the international community by PAHO, WHO and the United Nations system generated additional resources of US\$ 4.3 million of humanitarian aid, which were channelled through PAHO. Outstanding contributors during the emergency were the governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Canada, together with Ireland and the Netherlands.
4. These resources were utilized for the provision of safe water, the re-establishment of basic services, the organization and running of temporary shelters, mental health care activities, installation of an epidemiological surveillance system, control of outbreaks and vectors, proper handling of donated foodstuffs, essential drugs and vaccines, and the re-establishment of communications. The massive influx of donations for the affected countries was organized through the system for the management of inputs for humanitarian aid, which provided efficient and transparent management with the classification and the timely and controlled distribution of supplies to the affected populations. During a recent visit by the Director of PAHO to one of the affected countries, the President of that country expressed special gratitude for the support that the input management system

had given his country and thanked PAHO for its great contribution. The operations of the input management system were carried out by some 100 national and international volunteers, who set up the system at critical points for the arrival of donations (airports, Red Cross offices, ports, etc.). Special mention deserves to be made of the countries that facilitated the mobilization of these volunteers.

5. The activities were based on community mobilization and on guidance and technical support for the NGOs present in the affected area. Likewise, PAHO made intensive use of computer technology such as web pages to keep the international community informed about the situation and the needs. This service was greatly appreciated by everyone involved in supporting and collaborating with the countries in the face of this major tragedy. The same technology was used for the dissemination of information to the mass media and to make available WHO's standardized technical guides for emergency management.

6. In the early part of 1999 the countries embarked upon the reconstruction and transformation of Central America, acknowledging that without a massive investment in health the negative impact of Mitch on the achievements of the health sector would be accentuated, with adverse effects on social stability and economic recovery.

7. With this objective in mind, the Organization assisted countries to design reconstruction projects totalling US\$ 60 million which included reduction of vulnerability to disasters, nutrition, water and sanitation, epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases. Up to the present time we can report that, alongside the efforts made by each country to reallocate its own resources, PAHO has mobilized approximately US\$ 10 million from various contributors within the international community. This has made it possible to continue immunization activities with the support of USAID, activities for reduction of vulnerability to disasters with support from Sweden, and the activities for the control of outbreaks, epidemiological surveillance and strengthening of laboratories with support from the United Kingdom and USAID.

8. In addition to the foregoing, US\$ 1 million was provided by UNICEF to supplement the funds already allocated by PAHO. Moreover, PAHO also managed to mobilize the United States Congress in support of health in Central America; Congress allocated a total of US\$ 15 million so that the Centers for Disease Control of the United States of America could intervene in the task of disease control in these countries.

9. The international community met within an advisory group for the transformation and reconstruction of Central America in Stockholm in May 1999. The meeting considered the national projects for reconstruction and analysed priority topics for attention that were common to all the countries of the isthmus. Subsequently a mechanism was set up for monitoring the activities to be carried out in the four chiefly affected countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. This "Stockholm Group" is made up of Canada, Germany, Spain and the United States of America. During the current year national advisory groups have been set up in Honduras and Nicaragua and the Madrid consultation, now postponed until February 2001, is being organized. This consultation will consider the regional projects that are being prepared by the Central American Integration System (SICA) with the support of various agencies.

10. PAHO is in permanent contact with the health unit of the Social Integration Council and is providing it with continuous technical support through the PAHO Representative's Office in El Salvador, which has been strengthened with short-term consultants and regional advisers. At present it is assisting with the completion of two comprehensive macroprojects in strategic geographical areas (frontier towns and biological corridor) that include health components and an integrated social macroproject that includes the strengthening of health services, pooled purchasing of drugs, regional network of laboratories and epidemiological surveillance, disease control, improvement of environmental health and reduction of vulnerability to disease. It is hoped that the international community will continue to provide support in response to these major needs.

= = =