

LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES

RELIEF SECTOR
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EVALUATION OF THE RELIEF WORK AFTER THE GUATEMALA EARTHQUAKE OF 4 FEBRUARY 1976

In April 1977, approximately one year after the devastating earthquake struck in Guatemala, the Societies of Central America, Mexico, Panama and the USA met in Guatemala to evaluate the work done during the emergency and post-emergency period.

During three days each Society provided information on the positive and negative aspects of the operations. Frank discussions were held on method of notification, type of personnel and material sent, coordination in the field, international radio communications, state of preparedness, governmental cooperation, regional and international assistance, the role of the Red Cross National Society, the League and all participating Societies.

Several important conclusions and recommendations were noted which should assist both the Relief Sector and the National Societies in future international relief actions. We are attaching the recommendations as an incentive and model to other Societies as well as a mutual aid agreement which has resulted from these evaluations.

It should be pointed out that similar evaluations have been made in the past on the 1972 Managua earthquake and the 1974 hurricane Fifi and subsequent flooding. The League Relief Sector encourages all Societies experiencing major disasters to make similar evaluations of their relief actions on an individual or on a regional basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. To hold periodic national and regional meetings to train the staff of National Societies and improve their efficiency in disaster relief operations.
- II. To make periodic internal evaluations in each National Society in the region to ascertain its potential for service in relief operations and pass such evaluations to the governments concerned, so as to increase confidence regarding Red Cross preparedness for this kind of work.
- III. To make the Relief Directorate or Department responsible for monitoring, registering and supervising Departmental delegations and sub-delegations and their relief posts in so far as their organisation and operation are concerned, so as to determine the extent of their ability to act in disaster and support them in their preparation for this purpose.
- IV. To organise and carry out mock disaster relief operations with the aim of improving Red Cross training at all levels, and to evaluate such practice operations so as to remedy errors and guarantee their effectiveness.
- V. To reiterate the importance of requesting governments to define National Societies' functions and responsibilities in disaster relief operations, on the basis of Red Cross principles and international standards, so that National Societies shall have a firm basis on which to prepare their relief plans.
- VI. To reiterate that, as agreed at the Meeting of Presidents held in Panama City, Republic of Panama on 1 and 2 April 1977, the League of Red Cross Societies should be considered as the responsible body for coordinating relief operations, subject of course to the agreements made between the League and the ICRC.

- VII. To consider that the procedure followed by some National Societies in the phase of the reconstruction programme now being carried out in Guatemala does not at all serve the interests of adequate coordination of the League.
- VIII. To instruct and guide medical and relief teams serving in a stricken country not to take decisions bearing on public health, for example regarding vaccination campaigns, without prior consultation with the national health authorities in the country concerned.
- IX. To ask the League of Red Cross Societies to prepare a report containing evaluations of the following disasters: the Managua earthquake of 24 December 1972, Hurricane Fifi and the subsequent floods of September 1974, and the Guatemala earthquake of 4 February 1976, as a guide and an indication of the lines of action to be followed in any similar future disaster.
- X. That when National Societies send teams to a stricken country they should appoint a Chief of Operations of those Teams to coordinate them and to take responsibility for channelling all the assistance sent by his National Society.
- XI. To carry out periodic evaluations on the spot which will enable the activities of relief teams sent out by participating National Societies to be reorganised and adjusted to the situation.
- XII. That National Societies participating in relief operations should invariably send with their donations the relevant shipping documents specifying the addressee's name and the weight and value of the gift, for checking and information purposes.
- XIII. That National Societies should observe the principles of decentralising authority and delegating responsibility in relief operations.

- XIV. That National Societies whose scheme of organisation does not include Executive Committees should proceed to form such Committees in accordance with their requirements.
- XV. That in their restructuring activities National Societies should pay special attention to disaster preparedness and consider the national, municipal and local implications of their programmes of services and should make every effort to put into practice the results obtained by the Guatemalan Red Cross through its budget plan.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. That National Councils should do their best to ensure the progress of their Departmental delegations and sub-delegations and should not confine themselves only to administrative tasks at central headquarters.
- II. To recommend National Societies in the region which have not duly supplied their first aid corps with regulations to form special committees for that purpose so that they may have such regulations in the shortest possible time and improve the organisation of their first aid corps, so enabling their optimum performance of the ordinary and emergency tasks assigned to them.
- III. To recommend that National Societies' relief and/or disaster sections should devote themselves to cooperating in the reorganisation of first aid corps so that these duly integrated bodies may take part in relief operations.

REGIONAL AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL COLLABORATION
IN CASES OF DISASTER

1) INTEGRATION

This agreement on mutual collaboration based on principles and standards governing Red Cross aid activities in cases of disaster, will govern National Societies of Mexico, Central America and Panama.

2) COORDINATION

The Coordinator of the mutual collaboration system will be the President of the host National Society at the last Meeting of Presidents and Technical Seminars of the National Societies of the Regional Area.

3) OBJECTIVES

To improve a mutual collaboration system in cases of emergency between National Societies and the Red Cross of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, allowing, when so required, to support Red Cross activities at the country of the disaster.

4) LIMITATIONS

The mutual collaboration system in cases of disaster, will be complementary to the action performed by the National Society of the country of the disaster and is given at the request and under the authority of same.

5) INFORMATION

Regional Area National Societies which are members of the mutual collaboration system shall be kept informed every six months through the system's coordinator with respect to equipment and supply availability, to be used during any regional disaster.

- 6) National Societies will be kept informed through the Coordinator with respect to everything referring to national assistance plans in the countries of the area and the responsibility of each within their respective countries.
- 7) Regional Area National Societies will try to maintain a radio communications and telex system permitting at all times, and particularly in cases of disaster, the establishment of all necessary contacts.

6) PERSONNEL TRAINING

As far as possible, training of personnel for assistance must follow a regional pattern based on the rulings of the League of Red Cross Societies and the exchange of experiences and performance of simulacra at a regional level about a specific aid action, will be promoted.

9) COMMUNICATIONS

In case of a disaster, the National Society of the country where the disaster occurred will immediately advise the League of Red Cross Societies and the other National Societies of the area with respect to the magnitude of same and assistance required.

National Societies upon becoming aware of a disaster in a National Society of the area, will try through all means, including evaluators sent to the corresponding country, to become acquainted with the situation and inform the League of Red Cross Societies and other Societies.

10) SELF-SUFFICIENT BRIGADES

Personnel sent by National Societies to the country of a disaster during the emergency phase, must be self-sufficient with respect to room and board, transportation, so not to become a burden for the National Society where the disaster has occurred.

- 11) First Aid Brigades must be self-sufficient with respect to the material required to exercise their job, unless a specific request issued by the Society of the disaster exists.
- 12) Assistance Brigades duly identified in transit to the Society of the disaster may request assistance from National Societies.

All disbursements resulting from this assistance must be reimbursed by the Society to which the Assistance Brigade belongs.

13) FACILITIES

The National Society of the disaster must offer to National Societies appropriate means of contact and liaison, at the National Headquarters as well as at entry posts and areas where Assistance Brigades are in action.

MINIMUM SELF-SUFFICIENCY EQUIPMENT FOR EMERGENCY
BRIGADES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE

1. PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

- a) Uniform
- b) Changing clothes
- c) Helmet, belt, canteen, flash-light, boots, personal first-aid kit, knife or "machete", rope, whistle
- d) Raincoat or adequate coat according to climate

- c) Sleeping bag
- f) Personal eating utensils (dish, fork and spoon, cup or glass - unbreakable)
- g) Personal hygiene equipment.

2. BRIGADE EQUIPMENT

- a) Tents to be used as personnel quarters
- b) Tents to be used as food, medicine and general equipment storage rooms
- c) Tents to be used as First-Aid Posts
- d) Radio-Communications equipment
- e) Electric Plant and accessories
- f) Identification flags
- g) Additional brigade equipment according to speciality of service
- h) Stretchers
- i) Portable first-aid kits
- j) Healing materials and medicines
- k) Folding beds for personnel and First-Aid Posts
- l) Blankets for personnel and First-Aid Posts

3. BRIGADE SUPPLIES

- a) Food (all types)
- b) Water and purification tablets
- c) Fuel in accordance with type of transportation and distance
- d) Kitchen equipment
- e) Kitchen supplies
- f) Folding tables
- g) Stationery and office equipment
- h) Maps of the region
- i) Cash for mission expenses, according to budget.

4. TRANSPORTATION

- a) Ambulance
- b) Vehicle for personnel transportation

- c) Vehicle for cargo and equipment transportation
- d) Trailer tanks, 500 gallon capacity each, for fuel and water
- e) All of these vehicles will be adequate for the type of roads of the service region
- f) All of these vehicles must be equipped with the necessary accessories (spare tires, jacks, tools, fire extinguishers, etc.).

5. PERSONNEL TO INTEGRATE ONE BRIGADE

- a) Mission Chief (qualified as aid personnel)
- b) Medical Doctor
- c) Assistants according to speciality
- d) Radio Operator
- e) Drivers
- f) Recorder.