

projects are being modelled after known successes. Another is the UN International Emergency Network (UNIENET), a computer database system, which serves as an electronic billboard for Decade activities, as well as the latest data available on disasters in the making (*see story on page 52*).

As it stands, the Decade is seen as building on existing systems and approaches in a complementary manner. One such network is Interaction, a broad coalition of private voluntary organizations working in the areas of development, refugees, and disaster relief (*see story on page 54*).

Several concrete steps have been taken to get the Decade moving. Phase one activities in 1990 included assessments of the needs of individual countries. The UN also declared 10 October as the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction. In addition to the training programme, recent activities have included the first meeting of the Scientific and Technical Committee in Bonn, Germany, from 4 to 8 March.

The Committee session followed a number of international preparatory meetings on the Decade last year in Japan, Rome and Morocco.

In March, the Committee adopted at its first session the Hazard Prevention, Reduction, Environmental Safeguarding, Monitoring Programme with Targets (HAZARD PRE-EMPT), a set of guidelines for identifying hazard-control targets. It also endorsed the proposed structure for the Decade's framework programme with some additions, adopted initial criteria for project approval and selected 12 (5 ongoing, 7 new) demonstration projects, among them, a pilot project for disaster mitigation in hospital facilities in Latin America and one on international centres for research and training in mitigation of risks.

A second Committee meeting is being considered later in 1991. Also

discussed in Bonn was the need for a regional meeting of the National Committees for the Decade and a possible 1993 global meeting conference on the Decade.

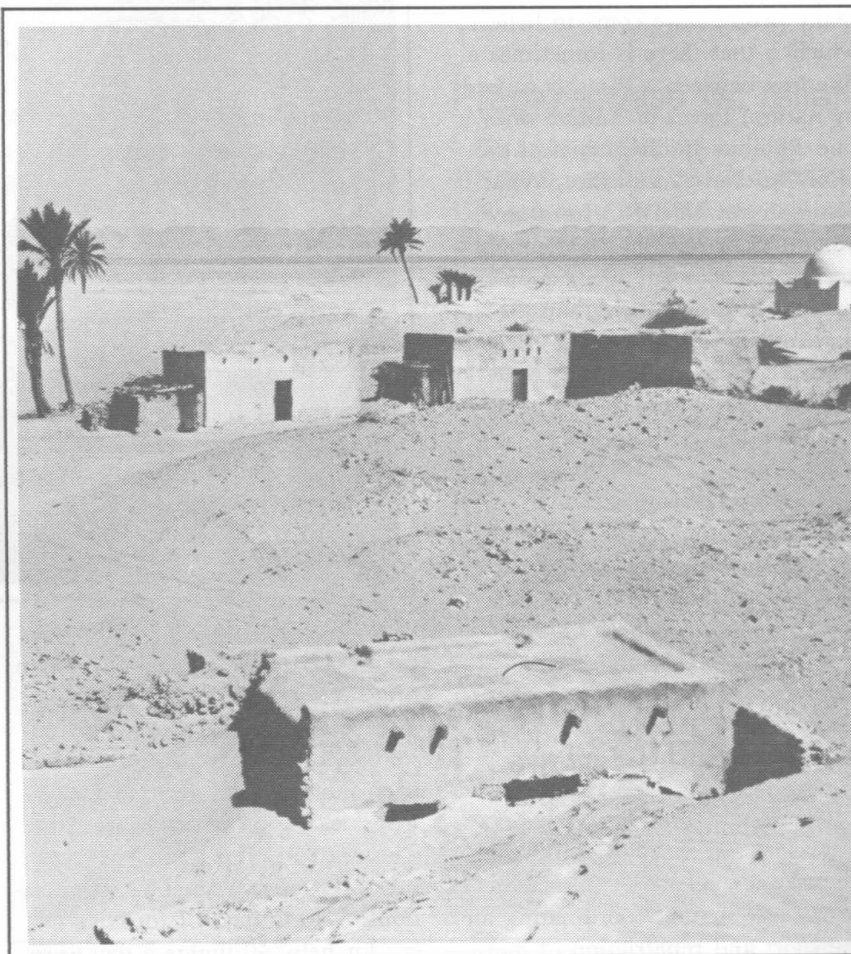
Examples of regional support for the Decade include the establishment last year of a seismic network in Colombia, the first of its kind in South America. On the international front, Morocco has offered facilities to stockpile relief supplies and material in the event of a sudden disaster. Other countries have put into place a variety of larger and smaller projects aimed at fulfilling the long-term goals of national preparedness.

There have been obstacles along the way as well. Some countries have expressed concern that the Decade is advancing more slowly

than planned. In October 1990, representatives from Bangladesh, the United Republic of Tanzania, Japan, the USSR and Colombia were quick to praise the work done by UNDRO as the umbrella agency for disaster mitigation. But they also expressed concern that staffing shortages and lack of funds were straining UN disaster-related work.

In reality, the march of Nature has forced agencies like UNDRO to cope with a greater number of sudden disasters than previously projected.

Will future generations look up to the sky and see a shining sun? Will locusts become a threat remembered only by historians? Decade planners hope so. They leave us with the message: Be prepared!



A Tunisian village abandoned to the desert.