

RISK PREVENTION AND MITIGATION: A WORLDWIDE NETWORK

Colombia, in the north-western corner of South America, where several tectonic plates interact, is a country of varied relief that renders it liable to a variety of natural processes. Its level of development and population characteristics have over time highlighted its exposure to a great many naturally occurring events such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods and tsunamis (tidal waves) of varying intensity, and to industrial and man-made events claiming large numbers of victims and causing material damage and serious social, economic and environmental effects.

Since the eruption of Mt. Ruiz in 1985, which claimed over 20,000 victims, totally destroyed the village of Armero, caused damage in Honda, Mariquita and Chinchiná and badly affected the economies of four different departments, the Colombian Government, by Act 46 of 1988, has set up a national system for risk mitigation and disaster preparedness with a coordinating office in the Office of the President; its objective is to undertake development planning with a view to the protection of the public and its property against natural or man-made mishap.

Government programmes have regarded as a strategic issue disaster prevention and mitigation as set forth in the 14 national proposals for promotion and development during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction declared by the United Nations Gene-

ral Assembly for the 1990s. These cover such matters as the production of risk maps and identification of maximum risk areas, the manufacture of instruments to monitor natural phenomena, institution-building and financial strengthening, the establishment of reserve centres, the formulation of contingency and emergency plans, education and training, vulnerability analysis, the re-siting of high-risk housing and the rehabilitation of degraded hydrological basins.

The incorporation of the concept of disaster prevention as a general strategy into regional and municipal development plans and, by extension, the design and launch of plans and programmes for the recovery of disaster-stricken areas, is a noteworthy feature of government policy. These points have been promoted locally, regionally and nationally through inter-institutional, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation with steadily increasing input from society at large ●

GALERAS VOLCANO
CHOOSE AS THE VOLCANO OF THE DECADE

