

NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR RISK MITIGATION AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN COLOMBIA

To promote investigations into different hazards and communities' vulnerability to them in coordination with preparations for a timely response in the event of disaster, the Colombian Government set up the National System for Risk Mitigation and Disaster Preparedness (SNPAD) under Act 46 of 1988, and issued the associated regulations in Decree 919 of 1989. The System comprises a collection of local, regional and national public and private entities and is intended to prevent and cope with disasters due to natural phenomena and accidents due to man-made causes.

The System owes its effectiveness to the fact that every participant is involved in these processes, and the decentralized manner in which its constituent entities participate. It is structured as follows:

- The National Emergency Committee is the System's guiding body. It consists of the Minister of the Interior or his representative, who chairs the Committee; the majority of ministers, the Director of Civil Defence, the Director of the Red Cross, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Its functions include providing the Government with all necessary information and support for declaring states of emergency and deciding on their nature and severity; the Committee also recommends the announcement of a return to normal when a disaster has been overcome, and suggests which of the special provisions applicable in emergencies should continue to apply during the phases of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.
- The National Technical Committee, which acts as an advisory body. It comprises the National Department for Disaster Prevention and Relief, which furnishes the chairman; the majority of ministries, the National Planning Department, Colombia National University, the national police force, the civil defence force, IDEAM (formerly the Colombian Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Land Development), Telecom, the Agricultural Marketing Institute (IDEMA), the Renewable Natural Resources and Environmental Development Institute (INDERENA), the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA), the Institute for Geological and Mining Research (INGEOMINAS), the Agustín Codazzi Geographical Institute (IGAC), and the Colombian Red Cross, among other institutions. It meets once a month to discuss disaster prevention; the guidelines it lays down are put into practice by advisory commissions on microbasins and environmental clean-up; education; dams and reservoirs; development and environmental planning; seismic and volcanic risks; forest fires; human settlements and housing; health; large-scale programmes; technological and industrial hazards; tsunami or tidal wave alerts; risk maps; and search and rescue; and by the National Fire Brigades Coordinating Board. These commissions bring together public entities and private experts on the various topics concerned.
- The National Operational Committee, comprising the Director of Civil Defence or his representative, who chairs the Committee; the National Director of Risk

Mitigation and Disaster Preparedness; one representative each from the Ministry of Health and the national Red Cross, and members of public and private bodies co-opted in view of the type and features of a disaster.

- The National Disaster Fund, established by Decree No. 1547 of 1984 as a special national account, financially and administratively independent and maintaining its own books and statistics, to serve the public interest and welfare, and dedicated to meeting needs arising out of disasters, catastrophes or similar events.
- The Ministry of the Interior's National Department for Disaster Prevention and Relief (until 1992 the National Office for Risk Mitigation and Disaster Preparedness), which is responsible for overall coordination of the National System. It comprises divisions for emergency support, education and information, regional coordination and national programmes.
- Regional and local emergency committees, chaired by the governors of departments and by municipal mayors respectively. These include the armed forces, local and municipal health services, the national police force, the civil defence force and the Colombian Red Cross, representatives of the autonomous regional corporations, trade unions, professional and community associations, departmental or municipal planning offices, as appropriate, and locally based regional and district bodies.

This National System has provided a basis for the launch or strengthening of comprehensive plans and programmes to improve disaster prevention and relief nationally and regionally, operating inter-institutionally and intersectorally in a development planning perspective.

The System has been promoting and coordinating activities and projects which reveal not only the risk or potential losses that

severe events might cause in an area or city but also the ability of its constituent entities and the general public to respond, so that institutional arrangements can be strengthened, training and education programmes for the community can be carried out, and hazard and vulnerability containment measures can be incorporated into local, district and urban planning in order to mitigate or reduce the risk.

The System has shown that if disaster prevention, relief and recovery efforts are to be effective and progress, it must be possible to carry out comprehensive projects and activities in an inter-institutional and decentralized manner; otherwise effective action is not possible, and the research and the technical and social studies undertaken in support of such action cannot be put to real use ●

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