

**INVESTING IN PREVENTION : LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM HURRICANE  
MITCH**

My name is Christian Bugnion. I am an economist, I have worked for the past twelve years in humanitarian aid, disaster prevention and preparedness and development. I have spent most of the time on the ground working in several countries both in Africa and Latin America, with a wide range of organisations and contexts (both natural and man-made disasters). My past employers include among others ICRC, IFRC, UNDP/WFP, UNHCR, ECHO, CRED (Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters), ICEI (Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales). I work as an independent consultant since 1994. This brief introduction is meant to indicate that I am not here representing any specific organisation or interests. The reason for my being here is to attempt to contribute to improved practices in disaster reduction, and particularly in the field of prevention. I will start by what is seemingly a more theoretical framework, and move towards a much more practical vision of things. I will finalise this presentation by making an appeal to all participants so that if the suggestions and recommendations made in this presentation are approved they be translated into facts as soon as possible.

The Decade is now coming to an end. While much has been done, there remains much to do. Disaster prevention and preparedness has emerged in most countries from a marginal into a valuable and recognised activity. But there is, to my knowledge, no donor or government having taken as of yet the bold step of allocating a fixed percentage of its budget to prevention and preparedness activities. And yet "disaster research has demonstrated that increasing hazard and vulnerability patterns are clearly related to flawed non-sustainable forms of development"<sup>1</sup>. In 1994, the United Nations were speaking of the urgent need to "balance emergency aid and development aid".<sup>2</sup> Although these comments were meant for conflict situations, a similar concern must be adopted for large scale disasters the size of Mitch. That is to say that disaster reduction must be adequately placed in the string of the equation which leads to equanimous human development for all.

To show and convince donors and governments, as well as all of civil society, of the usefulness of prevention and preparedness activities, disaster reduction must be seen alongside emergency and development aid. Disaster prevention, emergency aid and development are different sides of the same coin. This means that costs of disaster reduction should be analysed in comparison to the costs of emergency and development aid. This has not been the case up to now. If we take the 1991 ECLAC manual for evaluating socio-economic effects of natural disasters, one finds that evaluations aim at giving the direct and indirect damages, and the repercussion of the same in macro-economic aggregates (or secondary effects).<sup>3</sup> In ECLAC's own

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<sup>1</sup> Miami Declaration on Disaster Reduction and Sustainable Development, Florida Int. University, Florida, 2 October 1996, paragraph 2.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 1994, p. 84, French version.

<sup>3</sup> CEPAL, Manual, primera parte, punto III.