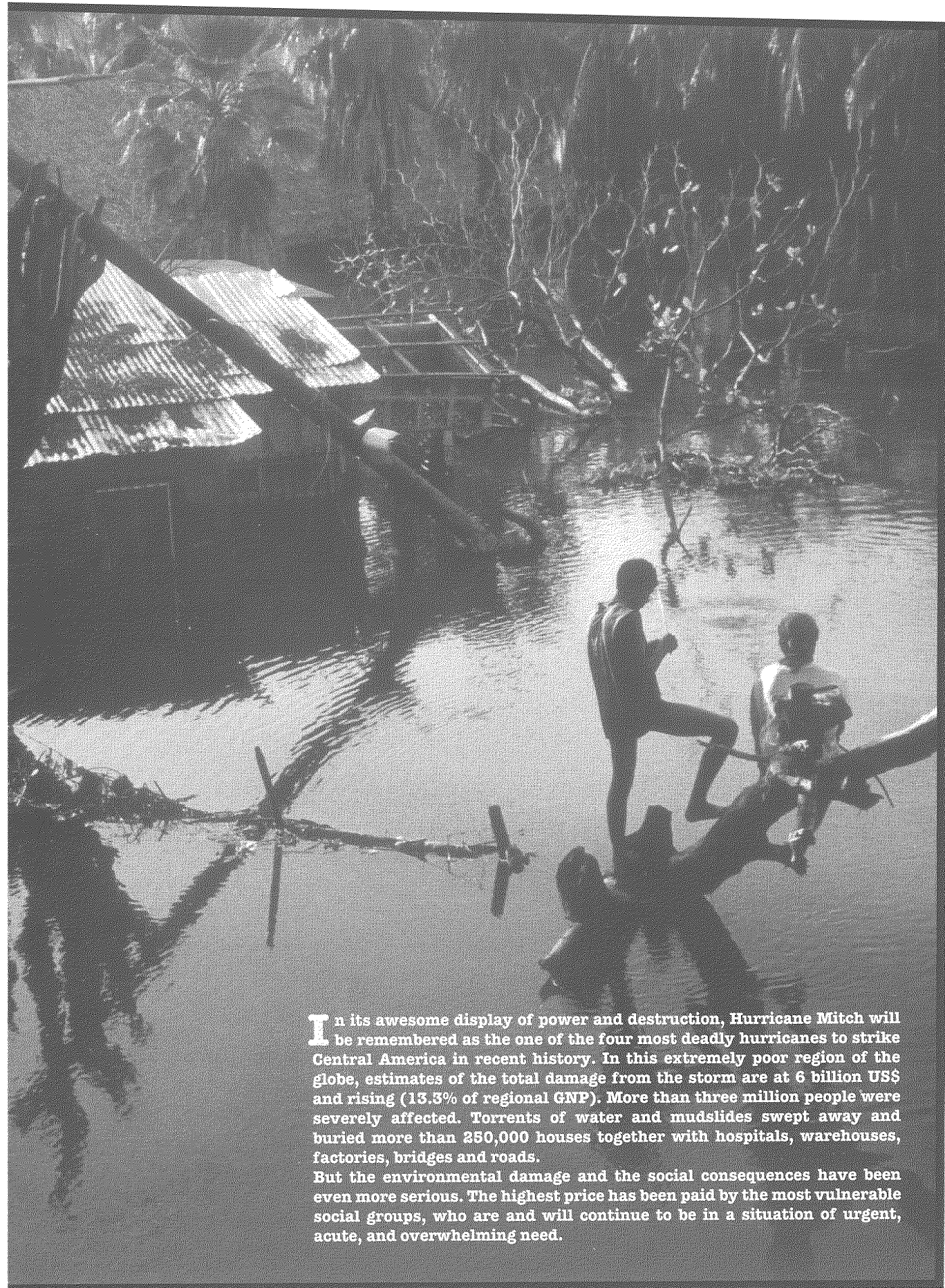




In its awesome display of power and destruction, Hurricane Mitch will be remembered as the one of the four most deadly hurricanes to strike Central America in recent history. In this extremely poor region of the globe, estimates of the total damage from the storm are at 6 billion US\$ and rising (13.3% of regional GNP). More than three million people were severely affected. Torrents of water and mudslides swept away and buried more than 250,000 houses together with hospitals, warehouses, factories, bridges and roads.

But the environmental damage and the social consequences have been even more serious. The highest price has been paid by the most vulnerable social groups, who are and will continue to be in a situation of urgent, acute, and overwhelming need.