A proposal for a Post-Graduate School on the **Mitigation of Natural Environmental Hazards in Central America**

Preamble

The isthmus of Central America is systematically exposed to a great number of rapid-onset natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, hurricanes etc. The impact of these calamities upon population and further socio-economic development is often catastrophic (cf the Mitch hurricane of 1998). Also the potential loss is steadily increasing due to increasing urbanization, industrialization and infrastructure complexity. There are no means to prevent natural disasters from occurring. However, by better understanding the processes generating and accompanying these disasters, we can save lives, reduce economic losses and the degradation of the environment.

Since 1992, SAREC/SIDA is funding (with minor contribution from NORAD) a project entitled *Seismotectonic Regionalization of Central America, SERCA*. The main objective of this project is to train seismological personnel on all levels to be able to perform various tasks associated with seismic hazard assessment. To date, there are about 35 graduates who passed a 6-month graduate course in seismology and by the end of 2000 there will be a dozen seismologists in the region with MSc or PhD degrees from Uppsala and/or Bergen. Even though earthquakes may be considered as the greatest hazard for life and well being on the planet, they represent only one category from a list of natural disasters.

The SERCA project will end in December 2000. All tasks formulated at the beginning of the project are being fulfilled and valuable experience has been acquired to run similar projects.

The Proposal

Studies and management of natural disasters are becoming an increasingly broad and interdisciplinary profession. They require contributions from a number of disciplines such as geophysics, geology, statistics, construction engineering, emergency management, etc. As of this writing, in Central America, there is no university with a corresponding curriculum. We