



**A desperate search  
for survivors among  
the rubble of a  
Mexico City  
hospital.**

man-made calamities also include desertification resulting from massive destruction of the habitat close to the cities, gas explosions and fires caused by faulty pipelines, the bursting of ill-built dams, and the sorry toll of death and injuries in modern warfare – that most preventable of disasters.

Economic hardship makes it difficult to prepare for disasters or deal with their aftermath. Countries with staggering debt burdens or war-torn economies are unable to strengthen their health services, to stock sufficient medicines, to build laboratories or to train personnel.

As the post-Cold War international order takes shape, the world has become more vulnerable to man-made disasters than ever before. Political turbulence triggers emergencies with large numbers of war victims and displaced persons, ruined farmland and industries, and health and social services disrupted almost beyond any hope of repair.

Deforestation, major oil spills and depletion of the ozone layer are not only disasters in themselves but render areas less able to cope with natural disasters that may follow.

Developing countries are especially vulnerable. They bear most of the burden of providing shelter, food and health services at such times – a burden which strains their own limited resources. Almost invariably they lack the training, awareness, planning or minimal investment required to mitigate the effects of disasters.

The practical measures that countries can take to prepare themselves against disasters include assessing the natural and man-made hazards to which they are vulnerable, listing their existing medical and health resources, drawing up contingency plans, vaccinating vulnerable groups (e.g., against yellow fever or measles), training health personnel, and keeping the public informed and aware. □