

Cooperation for Disaster Response

South Pacific

by Sabine Metzner-Strack*

The Field Coordination Support Unit and the Asia and Pacific Desk of the DHA Relief Coordination Branch organized a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) South Pacific Training Course from 11 to 21 November 1996 in Nadi, Fiji. The course was implemented through the DHA South Pacific Programme Office (SPPO) which, since 1991, has been playing a leading role in building up a regional network of disaster managers and in promoting effective disaster mitigation. The UNDAC training course built on these achievements with the objectives of strengthening national disaster management systems, enhancing regional cooperation for disaster response and establishing an UNDAC membership in the region.

Following the training of UNDAC

experts from Latin American countries, which took place in Ecuador in June 1995, this was the second regional UNDAC training course. It brought together 27 senior officials from seven Pacific Island countries (Fiji, Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Western Samoa and Vanuatu), representatives of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Overseas Service Bureau, an Australian NGO, as well as UNDP and WHO officials. DHA/SPPO staff took advantage of this training opportunity to prepare leading DHA post-disaster assessment and coordination missions.

The UNDAC course curriculum was adjusted to the needs of the

region. It included subjects ranging from the disaster environment, the United Nations context, assessment and coordination methodology, cultural awareness, stress management, mission readiness and the use of state-of-the art emergency telecommunications equipment. The emphasis on practical exercises fostered the strong team spirit which developed between the new UNDAC members and was particularly effective as a means of encouraging the participants to apply their wide and varied expertise to case-studies of disasters that had actually occurred in the region. A field assessment trip to Ba District in north-western Fiji, which had been severely affected by cyclone Kina in January 1993, gave participants the opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge about the effect of disasters on vulnerable populations, techniques for carrying out on-site assessment and the preventive action that is necessary to mitigate the impact of disasters.

By the end of the course, the new UNDAC members and the course management were confident that they had built a sound basis for the deployment, when needed, of an effective UNDAC team to assist South Pacific Island countries in coping with the aftermath of disasters and in providing timely and appropriate relief aid to those in need.



A sound basis to cope with disasters

**Sabine Metzner-Strack is Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Asian and Pacific Desk (RCB) DHA.*

Humanitarian Aid Provided by the Swiss Confederation

by Charles Raedersdorf*

The aim of the international humanitarian aid provided by the Swiss Confederation is to save lives where natural disasters have occurred and in areas of armed conflict, as well as to ease the suffering of the victims of such circumstances in all parts of the world. The aid provided is best known through the missions abroad of the Swiss Disaster Relief Unit (SDR). Support is also given to projects run by partner aid organizations including the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in Geneva.

International humanitarian aid is an instrument of Swiss foreign policy that can be put into operation rapidly. It is a concrete expression of solidarity. Humanitarian aid is provided under various circumstances including the following:

- Natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, drought, extreme cold, etc.);
- Man-made disasters (bursting of a dam, nuclear accidents, chemical accidents, etc.);
- Emergency situations resulting from armed conflict (war);
- Disasters or crises caused by infrastructural failure (e.g. in Eastern Europe).

The instrument

Humanitarian aid is provided by the Swiss Confederation either in the form of direct aid or as support to international or other Swiss humanitarian aid organizations. There are four forms of aid provided: personnel (members of the SDR), financial support, food supplies and material. There are four spheres of operation: prevention, rescue, survival and reconstruction.



EDA/SKH/S. Kaspar

In action in Greece: the Swiss Rescue Chain after the 1995 earthquake

Direct and indirect aid

Humanitarian aid is provided by the Swiss Confederation either at the request of the country directly con-

cerned or of other aid organizations, or through aid being offered by a Swiss mission abroad or through other channels.

- ◆ **Direct aid**

This consists mainly of providing SDR personnel. The unit comprises over 1,500 volunteers in the areas of: communications, construction, drinking water provision, environment/ABC, information/documentation, logistics, medicine, prevention and rescue.

- ◆ **Indirect aid**

The Swiss Confederation also provides financial aid, food and material and SDR personnel for projects run by other organizations. Over the past few years, the need for financial aid for large and increasingly complex projects run by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have continued to rise. Contributions to these organizations constitute around two thirds of the total federal budget for humanitarian aid.

Spheres of operation

- ◆ **Prevention**

Prevention of disasters is becoming increasingly important. Preventive projects are often carried out in collaboration with Swiss universities or specialized institutions, or as part of an international programme. Examples include setting up a network for monitoring volcanic activity in Guatemala (with the University of Geneva) and support for a disaster prevention and management training programme for people from developing countries (in collaboration with international organizations).

- ◆ **Rescue**

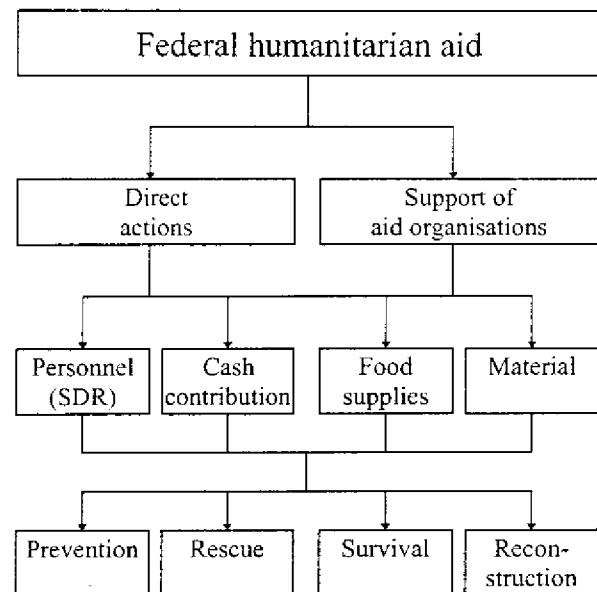
The main tasks in this sphere of operation are rescuing and treating victims of natural disasters. The SDR can also call upon the immediate assistance of the Swiss Rescue Chain (SRC) which is specialized in rescuing victims of earthquakes. The SRC, which comprises eight different units, was called into action three times in

The instrument:

The capabilities:

The resources:

The spheres:



1995: in Kobe (Japan), Aegion (Greece) and Dinar (Turkey).

food, the supply and erection of emergency shelters (tents, temporary housing) and medical treatment.

- ◆ **Survival**

Essential needs for survival include the provision of drinking water, the supply and distribution of

- ◆ **Reconstruction**

Infrastructure (main roads, bridges, etc.) must be repaired and

Swiss Support for DHA

During the period 1993 to 1996 the Swiss Confederation contributed Sw F 12.3 million to DHA. This amount includes, among others, the cost of one Senior Programme Officer and one Telecommunications Expert from the Swiss Disaster Relief Unit (SDR) as well as one Political Affairs Officer.

On an operational level, DHA and the Swiss Division of Humanitarian Aid collaborate closely. For example, six members of the SDR are permanently available to DHA for UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) missions, and the Swiss Chairman of the INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) is also on hand to lend assistance when necessary. Over the past year, the Swiss Division of Humanitarian Aid also organized and funded two DHA courses which were attended by people from more than 25 countries: an UNDAC course in Lausanne and an MCDA (Military and Civil Defence Assets) course in Geneva. In some projects, such as in Angola or Rwanda, members of the SDR work hand-in-hand with DHA.

In addition to the Sw F 12.3 million provided by the Swiss Division of Humanitarian Aid, the Political Department of the Swiss Foreign Ministry also contributed Sw F 2 million to the DHA's Trust Fund for Mine Clearance.

public buildings (hospitals, schools, etc.) and housing have to be rebuilt. At the same time, federal humanitarian aid includes setting up health programmes.

Funding

Swiss federal humanitarian aid is funded through taxes. The annual budget for humanitarian aid is fixed by the Parliament as part of the federal budget (Sw F 222 million for 1997).

The organization

Within the Swiss Federal Administration, the Division of Humanitarian Aid and SDR are responsible for providing humanitarian aid. This division has a staff of around 40 people and is part of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which in turn is part of the Swiss Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Humanitarian Aid provided by the Swiss Confederation in 1996

During 1996 the Swiss Confederation provided aid for 440 projects in 90 countries in the amount of Sw F 230 million. The main areas involved were Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The Swiss Disaster Relief Unit (SDR) reported that 171 members were deployed in 31 countries for a total of 19,000 days.

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Honduras Floods

A Swift Response

*by Carlos Pereira**

In November 1996, heavy rainfall in the Northern Atlantic coast of Honduras caused serious flooding in several regions. The Government of Honduras requested an UNDAC team to assist in the evaluation of needs. A three-person UNDAC mission was quickly deployed to the disaster site for an emergency assistance mission. From late November to early December 1996, the UNDAC team, together with representatives of UNDP, WFP, and PAHO/WHO, visited the most affected areas (Colón, Atlántida, Yoro and Cortéz) and, after contacts with regional, local and municipal authorities as well as with

the population affected, prepared a thorough report on the damage caused, the number of victims and the most pressing needs.

On 1 December 1997, the UNDAC findings were presented at a meeting organized by the United Nations Resident Coordinator, with the national authorities, the international community based in Honduras, the United Nations Disaster Management Team and NGOs. These findings constituted the triggering factor that prompted the response from the international community. Resources were mobilized by DHA, on the basis of the reports provided by the UNDAC team. The international community responded swiftly, with approximately US \$900,000 (cash and in-kind) pledged bilaterally or through DHA, including a DHA Emergency Grant of US \$10,000. The targeted population was of about 15,000 families (75,000 persons), of which 7,500 families (37,500 persons), both in urban and rural areas, have benefited from immediate emergency assistance.

In addition to damage assessment, identification of priority needs, and coordination of international assistance, the UNDAC team also addressed mitigation and preparedness aspects and made recommendations for a careful follow-up of rehabilitation and reconstruction. The team ended its mission on 6 December 1996.

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DHA/C. Pereira

Caught in the floods