

## SITUATION PRIOR TO THE ONSET OF MITCH

The following entities of the UN are represented in Honduras: FAO, WHO/PAHO, ITU, UNIDO, UNFPA, WFP, UNDP and UNICEF (over the last two months, IOM and UNESCO have also established teams involved in specific projects). Most share **common premises** and a number of important services, and their efforts to promote a more unified presence in the country were recognised by the Secretary General who recently designated Honduras as the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean area where a UN House will be established in the first quarter of 1999. The relevant process has represented an excellent **interagency coordination** exercise contributing to the efforts of agencies to optimise intervention in the country and deliver more coherent and effective assistance.

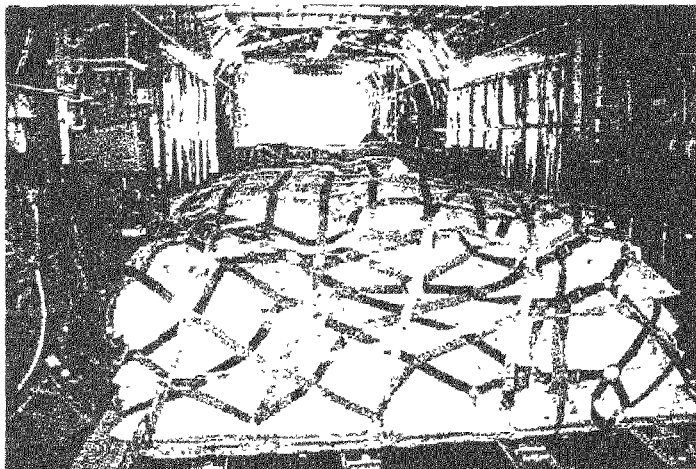
The preparation of the Common Country Assessment (CCA), which prioritise human development and vulnerable groups, has allowed the country team to build closer ties, based on team work and a participatory approach involving the Government, thus contributing to the coordination of development assistance. It has also facilitated collective interaction and partnership with the civil society in three thematic areas: poverty, environment and AIDS, with each discussion group being led by a distinct agency. There are various examples of projects in response to the country's basic needs sponsored by a number of UN entities pulling their efforts together and sharing responsibilities, which represent advances towards integrated programming of the UN System. The **harmonization** of programming cycles has also become a central element of interagency activity. This is expected to be achieved for the four Development Group (DG) agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and UNDP) by the year 2002, requiring for certain agencies the approval of bridging operations (meanwhile, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP are preparing a harmonized 1999-2001 rehabilitation programme which will use some of the resources of the regular programme and additional resources that are expected to be available for rehabilitation). This year, work teams from the DG agencies will prepare their programmes in the context of a United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

The conditions were therefore excellent for a coordinated UN response to the disaster caused by the Mitch hurricane. They were also very good for UN interaction with **national institutions**. Indeed, the UN system in Honduras has always worked closely with the Government and national institutions to which it has been granted privileged access. UN interventions are programmed and evaluated by mixed sectional working groups involving both the UN agencies and Government services concerned. The consultative process, which also involves various elements of civil society, is at the heart of any UN support to the country.

Disaster preparedness and mitigation are no exception to this close relationship, nor are they new fields of UN-National co-operation. For example, since July 1997, a UNDP project has been supporting capacity building and strengthening of disaster prevention and management in three departments (Cortés, Atlántida and Colón). A recent report of

buildings, mostly schools. These were disseminated in daily **situation reports** issued by the UN/Honduras office from 3 November and available on a special Mitch web site set up for that purpose. Coordination meetings continued to be held with Government, donors and NGOs, hosted by UNDMT.

The UN System agencies continued their emergency relief operations and resource mobilisation efforts, while reviewing and adapting their in-country **structure** to address the priority emergency needs, with most of them suspending their regular cooperation programme. All the major agencies recruited additional **staff** and were strengthened with international officers seconded from other offices or recruited for that purpose. Early in November, the UN Resident Coordinator's office was strengthened with an emergency officer seconded by UNDP HQ, followed by a second one soon after. A senior consultant for emergency coordination was also recruited to assist the RC in setting up an **Emergency Cell** and coordinating the preparation of the inter-agency transitional appeal. This was followed by the setting up of **field operations** with the recruitment and assignment of staff to four field locations to facilitate vital links with the affected population, and to support and monitor the implementation of emergency programmes. UNDP and UNICEF had each provided \$50,000 for the first response, followed by an OCHA grant of \$50,000 authorised on 19 November, a \$200,000 UNDP grant for the establishment of the Emergency Cell (UNDP provided later a further grant of \$500,000 to support field operations). The WFP Representative also approved the first week a \$200,000 rapid response food aid operation. UNICEF, beside its relief support to displaced people in shelters, undertook the distribution of **clean water** in the city of Tegucigalpa on which depended 70% of the population (by now reduced to about 25%). Dozens of local **UN Volunteers** were hired together with a number of international volunteers who provided assistance in the distribution of relief items and monitoring of conditions in the shelters.



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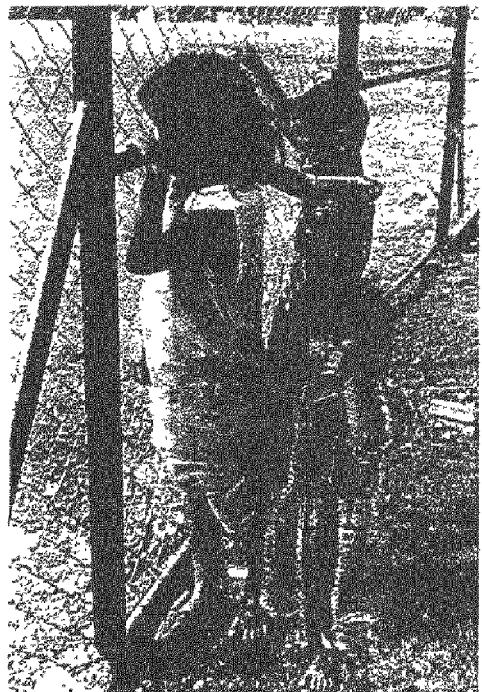
On 12 November, WFP approved a major regional emergency **food aid** operation for the countries affected by Mitch, including for Honduras some \$29 million for 650,000 people over a period of six months, followed by a food security mission to determine needs for

protracted food aid support. This was followed by a joint WFP/UNICEF mission for **telecommunication** linked to the establishment of 7 additional WFP sub-offices throughout the country (two already existed prior to the disaster) to assist and monitor food aid logistics and distribution. Relevant equipment was then financed by both WFP and UNICEF.

The first **OCHA** **airlift** (high protein food and other relief supplies) from its warehouse in Pisa arrived on 7 November and a second one was delivered on 21 November. OCHA also channelled various donor contributions, in kind or cash, including a Norwegian airlift of water equipment which arrived on 8 December. All of these were co-ordinated by the UNDAC team, in close co-operation with UNICEF. They provided most useful inputs although the timeliness of the airlifts could hardly compete with the hundreds of earlier air cargo deliveries by dozens of donor countries and relief agencies.

In late November, IOM set up an office in Tegucigalpa to assist UNDP in carrying out a census of displaced people in **shelters** and support relevant activities, including the construction of temporary shelters for persons unable to return home.

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Christmas was celebrated with toys, bread and blankets from UNICEF, UNDP and WFP.