

# JCPA Memorandum

## Jewish Council for Public Affairs

**To:** JCPA Member Agencies

**From:** Martin J. Raffel, Associate Director

**Attached is the final report on the activities of the Jewish coalition that came together in the wake of the devastating hurricane that hit Central America in 1998. The report was prepared by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which served as the coalition's coordinating body. I share this with you because, in addition to being aware of all the useful work that was accomplished, you may wish to share the report or portions of it with coalition partners in the inter-religious and/or Hispanic communities.**

### **The Jewish Coalition for Hurricane Mitch Relief**

#### **Coalition Activities: Final Report -- July 2001**

##### **I. Background**

At the end of October 1998, Hurricane Mitch ripped through Central America, killing over 9,000 people, injuring over 13,000 and leaving more than 2 million homeless. Experts estimated that there was more than \$8.5 billion worth of direct and indirect damage from the storm in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, with \$3.4 billion in Honduras alone. The storm destroyed as much as 70% of important crops such as bananas and coffee in Honduras and Nicaragua, along with most of the roads and bridges needed to carry produce from the rural mountains to central markets. The Inter-American Development Bank estimated that up to 90% of roads and other infrastructure was destroyed in Honduras, the worst hit nation.

Immediately after the storm struck, the Jewish Coalition for Hurricane Mitch Relief was formed to ensure a unified and coordinated Jewish response to help the victims on a non-sectarian basis. Within weeks of the Coalition's establishment, eight local and international partner agencies were identified to carry out immediate relief and intermediate-term reconstruction efforts in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. Each partner organization had both an established relationship with at least one Coalition member, as well as a proven record of success in the affected countries.

## II. PROGRAMMING OF MAILBOX FUNDS

The Jewish Coalition for Hurricane Mitch Relief raised and distributed a total of \$657,040 (\$566,000 in contributions, plus \$91,040 in interest). Initial disbursements were made to eight local organizations in the months soon after the hurricane, and an additional grant was provided to each of the same agencies in July 1999. Four of the original partner agencies received further financial support for additional Mitch-related activities, as follows:

	<b>December 1998</b>	<b>July 1999</b>	<b>July 2000</b>
<b>Operation USA</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	
<b>Project HOPE</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	\$13,000
<b>Pro Mujer</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	\$24,540
<b>Proyecto Aldea Global</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	
<b>SHARE Foundation</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	\$38,500
<b>Foundation for Self Sufficiency</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	\$15,000
<b>International Medical Corps</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	
<b>Direct Relief International</b>	\$37,500	\$33,250	

Copies of activity reports that were sent to Coalition members in April 1999, December 1999 and June 2000 are available upon request to supplement the final summaries below.

## III. PROJECT SUMMARIES

### A. Operation USA (Nicaragua)

The first disbursement of Coalition funding to Operation USA was pooled with other grants and divided among several local NGOs that were conducting relief activities in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. Operation USA supported organizations such as Provalidenic, which rebuilt health clinics in remote areas where other health facilities did not exist; UNICAFE, which provided technical assistance to the country's coffee growers who had lost approximately 50% of their crops in the storm; and CEPS (Center for Research and Social Promotion), which established micro-enterprise (chicken-egg production) activities for communities who had lost their means for earning income. The second grant to Operation USA enabled them to support a center for street children in the capital city of Managua, and expand a post-traumatic stress program in Posoltega, one of the most devastated towns in Central America.

The Centro Juvenil de Capacitacion y Convivencia (Center for Street Children) teaches skills to over 200 homeless children and at-risk youth. The Center offers instruction in carpentry, typing, cooking, sewing, beauty school, leather-work and printing in an effort to teach the children skills that will help them to acquire paying jobs. Funds from the Coalition enabled the center to buy furniture for classrooms, new machines for carpentry, sewing and beauty workshops, and to establish a co-op where the children's products

could be sold. Although the Center still struggles financially and lacks competent management, Operation USA reports that today, the children assisted by Coalition support are demonstrating the benefits from the Center's programs, as well as the importance of skills-training in improving their lives. For instance, two 16-year old girls are two of the ten students who graduated from the beauty workshops. Both have opened parlors in their homes and with the money earned from five manicures and pedicures a day, they earn enough to feed their families and go to night school. In addition, ten students graduated from the carpentry workshop and are now working as assistants in wood-working shops around the city. All ten students found it easy to find jobs as the machines on which they were trained - machines that were purchased with Coalition funds - are being used in most of the shops today.

Operation USA worked with the local organization, El Centro Ecumenico Antonio Valdivieso in Posoltega to provide counseling and training to victims of Hurricane Mitch. As noted in earlier reports, Posoltega suffered some of the worst damage in all of Central America during the storm as the Casitas volcano filled with rainwater and burst, creating a mudslide that killed thousands of people. While the physical destruction sustained in Posoltega was enormous, the psychological damage was also great.

With Coalition support, a team of six local psychologists, three social workers and three social promoters conducted ninety-eight workshops for over 2,000 teachers, community leaders, parents, teenagers and children for 13 months beginning in April 1999.

Individual counseling was also provided to 100 victims who required special attention, 85% of whom are today living "normal" lives. The team used a variety of counseling techniques, including breathing exercises, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing) and more traditional methods to help victims overcome insomnia, eating disorders, profound depression, headaches and other physical disorders brought on by not only the trauma of Hurricane Mitch, but by memories of the 10-year civil war, as well.

In addition to the counseling that the victims received, many of these beneficiaries were trained in the basics of providing therapy, as well. When community leaders and teachers returned to their communities, they were able to provide support to family members, friends, students and community members. At the end of the program, a UCLA-based psychologist visited Nicaragua to evaluate the Center's work. She found a dedicated and creative team in Posoltega that was utilizing empirically validated techniques for post-traumatic stress intervention. In addition, the professionals had a very good understanding of the cultural and socio-political environment in which they were working, and this played an important role in their success.

In large part because of the success the Center had with Mitch survivors, many local NGOs have become convinced of the importance of psycho-social programs, and El Centro is now training several of these organizations. **In addition, El Centro won a grant of \$75,000 from USAID in 2001, renewable in 2002, to continue their efforts on a national level.** This is one example of how Coalition funding has been leveraged to maximize the value of partners' work.

## **B. Project HOPE (Honduras and Nicaragua)**

In the weeks immediately following Hurricane Mitch, Project HOPE organized a series of humanitarian relief supply shipments by air. On behalf of the Coalition, JDC contributed \$5,000 towards this effort, which in total, sent over 31,000 pounds of urgently needed medicines and supplies worth over \$500,000.

HOPE also focused early relief efforts on health promotion, and the retraining of health professionals and community members in an effort to limit the adverse health effects caused by the loss of housing, contamination of the water supply and damage to the sanitation system. In both Honduras and Nicaragua, Coalition funds were used to support HOPE's Mother/Child Health programs, including "health groups" and "Child Survival Centers." In health groups, volunteers meet with mothers in each participating community once a month for presentations on topics such as the importance of breast-feeding, family planning, illness treatment and good hygiene. Sessions also include vaccination, growth monitoring and nutritional components. In Child Survival Centers, infants are weighed, vaccinated and receive check-ups regularly. Preventative campaigns are conducted from these Centers, as well. Jewish Coalition funds were also used for community health seminars, which train nurses, nutritionists, dentist's assistants and other medical para-professionals who in turn, train health volunteers to work with mothers in their respective communities. Coalition funds also helped HOPE to purchase medicines in both countries for health posts and hospitals that were impacted by Mitch.

Recognizing that it was also important to maintain and expand economic opportunities in the wake of Mitch, HOPE used Jewish Coalition funds to help rebuild their "village health banks" in the regions of Honduras that were most severely affected. Coalition funds were used for credit capital (new loans) for 20 of their village banks. Women used the loans to start up small businesses such as neighborhood stands that sell tortillas, clothing, make-up, firewood and candy. In addition to helping women generate income, these banks also provide health education. At each bank meeting, health volunteers trained by the Red Cross cover topics such as first aid, natural medicine, reproductive health, immunizations and domestic violence.

Twelve new banks were opened with a portion of the second disbursement of Coalition funds in Tegucigalpa and the southern city of Choluteca. Matching funds from Project HOPE were used to cover the operational costs associated with the opening of these new banks, so that Coalition funds were used exclusively for loans to approximately 300 participating women. As an indication of the success of these banks and the women who utilize them, repayment after the first round of loans was 100%. At the end of 2000, these banks had completed 5 lending cycles, so that the original Coalition contribution has been recycled five times. **HOPE contributed an additional \$62,500 of funds raised from other sources to supplement the Coalition's donation.**

The second disbursement of Coalition funds was also used to provide assistance to the Ministries of Health in Honduras and Nicaragua. After conducting a comprehensive assessment of the status of equipment in hospitals and smaller clinics in both countries, HOPE sent over \$350,000 worth of emergency and intensive care equipment to several of their medical facilities. The donated equipment was installed; specialized training of local technicians associated with the Ministries of Health was provided; and the final detailed survey of the working status of medical equipment in several hospitals was shared with both Ministries of Health. Coalition funds were used to cover partial costs for shipping the equipment, logistical support for HOPE's volunteer team from the US, local costs associated with on-site training, and costs associated with performing the assessment.

The Coalition also supported the House-to-House Survey/Health Intervention Project in an area of Honduras that had been previously served by the El Chile Health Center, which was totally destroyed by Mitch. The survey was conducted in 500 homes in six communities to assess local health needs and to help devise a long-term strategy to address those needs. Three multi-disciplinary teams went house-to-house, conducting the survey while simultaneously providing treatment and health education, and referring those who required additional care to local hospitals. The teams focused their educational efforts on the importance of deworming, iron supplements and growth monitoring, as well as issues related to reproductive health, diet and hygiene. Community members also participated in campaigns regarding preventative activities, such as environmental clean up. The efforts of the teams were coordinated with the clinic, which continues to conduct outreach campaigns on basic sanitation, immunization, nutrition, mother/child health care, recycling and domestic violence. **As noted in previous reports, the Honduran Ministry of Health was extremely pleased with the program's end results, and plans to use HOPE's model of "integrated outreach health activities" with future teams of their own.** HOPE remains interested in the long-term health status of this population and will continue to seek funding to work again in the area - 23 communities of approximately 56,000 people - that is serviced by the El Chile Center.

In May, Project HOPE requested a modification of the Biomedical Engineering (BME) Project in Nicaragua, which had been approved and funded by the Coalition in July 2000. The initial project was to provide technical training and materials to the Medical Equipment Maintenance Center (CEMED) of the Ministry of Health in Nicaragua. Unfortunately, it was not possible to implement this project, and the Coalition subsequently agreed to let HOPE utilize the remaining funds for a new project (*please see May 23, 2001 Coalition fax*).

This new HOPE project utilizes the final Coalition contribution to help meet some of the urgent equipment needs in Nicaraguan medical facilities by providing basic medical equipment. To date, all of the equipment has been purchased, some in the US and a few items locally, and delivery to the health centers and health posts is expected to take place by the first week of August. The items purchased are: stethoscopes and

sphygmomanometers (blood pressure monitors) for adults and children, nebulizers, mouthpieces, masks, ultrasonic fetal pulse detectors, umbilical cord clamps, and flashlights with batteries.

The donation will support 81 health units in 15 municipalities with a population of approximately 300,000 in the areas of Boaco, Chontales and Jinotega. HOPE's training and education activities are also expected to increase the percentage of people who seek formal medical services. According to HOPE, only 15% of the population in these areas utilize the health clinics and other medical facilities, making the current number of project beneficiaries approximately 45,000. In addition, 3,370 women are expected to give birth in Jinotega where equipment for "Traditional Birth Attendants" was provided, increasing the number of direct beneficiaries to over 48,000.

### **C. Pro Mujer (Nicaragua)**

The first disbursement of Coalition funds provided to Pro Mujer was used to help their established clients recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch. After the storm, many clients were unable to repay their "village bank" loans to Pro Mujer due to the fact that their businesses were adversely affected. In most cases, members used their savings to partially repay their loans, thereby depleting their savings.

Combined with other donations, the Coalition contribution was used to create an emergency reserve fund for approximately 200 communal banks of between 20-30 members each. A percentage of this fund was deposited directly into the savings accounts of these banks, and was governed by bank members themselves. Many women benefited from this fund in order to re-establish their business in the aftermath of Mitch. In other cases, members chose not to use the fund immediately, but wanted to continue investing in it for their future security. According to Pro Mujer, this timely Coalition contribution greatly strengthened the communal banks and their members' ability to cope with the post-Mitch uncertainty. It is important to note that no Pro Mujer client loans were forgiven after Mitch: the women assumed full responsibility for their debt and were able to address immediate and future needs through the establishment of this reserve fund.

Pro Mujer continued to strengthen its programs in Nicaragua with the second disbursement of Coalition funds, which were used to increase credit to and train over 4,000 of their clients in Managua, Leon, Chinandega, Masaya and Esteli who were affected by Mitch. In addition, Coalition funds were used to develop and carry out Business Development Services (BDS) country-wide, which helped women improve their small businesses. The BDS program was initiated in response to client demand for additional services to help increase profitability of the businesses they had started with Pro Mujer loans. Based on a comprehensive survey carried out among PM clients, four main services were designed for BDS: training and technical assistance for product improvement; commercialization of products produced by clients; training in business self-evaluation and assessment; and the provision of larger loans. As a result, women were able to improve their products and business (e.g., sandals, textiles, ceramics),

expand their markets and manage their finances more efficiently. Pro Mujer has designed an “impact evaluation instrument” in order to follow up on the effects of the training sessions on the businesses of their clients. The BDS program has expanded over the months, and is currently working with a total of 205 women.

The Jewish Coalition’s third grant to Pro Mujer was used to improve their management information system in Nicaragua. The appropriate hardware and software have been purchased to operate “SAF2000,” a more powerful, flexible and secure system than the one that had previously been utilized. This new system links Pro Mujer’s loan portfolio with its accounting system, making tracking and maintenance of their loans and payments much more efficient. It will also allow Pro Mujer to diversify the type of financial services it is able to provide; improve financial management and reporting; track basic demographic and social indicators of its clients; and facilitate project evaluation. The accounting system is currently being utilized and they are planning on inputting the loan portfolio by the end of 2001. This new system will benefit over 6,500 women in Nicaragua who are current clients of Pro Mujer.

**As noted in earlier reports, Pro Mujer received two USAID grants following Hurricane Mitch: \$1.2 million to expand their activities in Nicaragua, and \$1.5 million to establish a program in Peru.** Pro Mujer has noted that the assistance they received from the Jewish Coalition strengthened and improved their work, helping to increase their success in acquiring governmental and other important funds.

#### **D. Proyecto Aldea Global (Honduras)**

The damage caused by Hurricane Mitch in Proyecto Aldea Global’s (PAG’s) project area was extensive, both in human casualties and the destruction of property and infrastructure. PAG was quick to address some of the most immediate needs: distributing emergency supplies and medicines; treating the injured and preventing disease outbreaks through the use of medical brigades; rebuilding rural infrastructure; purchasing agricultural tools and seeds; and providing building material for housing reconstruction. Emergency aid was concentrated in the central region of Honduras and included assistance to approximately 314,000 inhabitants in over 280 communities.

With Coalition support, PAG made repairs to nearly 250 water systems, the majority of which were conducted through their Food for Work program, through which local workers receive food rations in exchange for manual labor. PAG was also able to mobilize earth-moving equipment to help reopen major highways and rural roads. By April 1999, nearly 100 miles of road had been rehabilitated in two major zones. The rehabilitation consisted of clearing the roads of landslides, boulders and other debris and re-grading the road surface. Though equipment breakdown hampered their efforts, progress was substantial and PAG improved or facilitated access to over 115 communities. PAG also used Coalition funds to help relocate and/or provide new housing for 256 families and repair the homes of 300 additional families. **This initial grant also helped PAG leverage additional funding from the Union Church in**

**Tegucigalpa, which enabled them to complete fifty homes in the Monte Redondo Housing Community for Mitch victims, as well as from other donors .**

The second disbursement of Coalition funds helped PAG establish another housing community in the region of Las Lajas, Brisas del Campo (Country Breezes). Las Lajas experienced great damage during Mitch and hundreds of families lost their homes. A total of 125 homes were built on a new site, situated on high ground, with approximately 625 relocated beneficiaries. Recipient families participated in the construction of the homes with supervision and technical assistance from members of Project Global Village staff. As reported in previous updates, each family received food through a separate and very successful Food for Work program conducted by PAG. The construction of the community is nearly complete, and each house has a kitchen, flush toilet and shower, and water and sanitation systems. PAG will continue to work with Brisas on issues regarding health, environmental preservation, sustainable agriculture and community-building.

**As one of the first donors to commit funds to Brisas del Campo, Coalition support played a key role in helping PAG leverage additional funds for this effort.**

**Organizations who subsequently supported the activities in Brisas include: CRWRC (Christian Relief World Reformed Committee), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the World Accord in Canada, and a small school in Portland, Oregon, which contributed funds to help build a school for Brisas' many children.** The site has also received assistance from numerous volunteers, including several group and individual visits from the American Jewish World Service, a Jewish Coalition member.

#### **E. SHARE Foundation (El Salvador)**

The first Jewish Coalition disbursement comprised the bulk of an allocation which SHARE made immediately following Mitch to the United Communities of Usulután (COMUS) and Universitaris pel Tercer Mon (MON-3) for emergency basic-grain planting in 10 communities in Usulután, El Salvador. The project was developed to benefit 283 families, all of whom had lost seasonal crops to the storm. Over 75% of the project beneficiaries - approximately 1,300 people - prepared soil for planting, and cultivated and harvested corn and/or white bean. The remaining 25% of project beneficiaries chose to defer planting until the rains began in May. Funds were used for mechanized soil preparation, seeds, fertilizer, insecticide, and transportation and other operational costs. In addition to providing desperately needed resources for basic-grains production, the project also helped to organize the community.

The Coalition's next two grants were used to support the Advocacy Committee for Agricultural and Rural Development (CIDAR, formerly the Rural Committee for Equitable Rural Development Policies). CIDAR's broad coalition of peasant farmers and cooperatives, representing over 250,000 people and 70% of the organized rural population, works to develop alternative policies for agricultural and rural development. Their goal is to ensure passage of a national platform of such policies, including, for example, the provision of subsidies for acquiring insurance for small farmers and

fisherman to help guard against devastating losses from future natural disasters. (*Please see the June 2000 Coalition report for a more detailed description of CIDAR.*)

With Coalition funds, SHARE was able to sponsor activities with CIDAR including advocacy trips to Washington, DC; regional workshops for over 300 participants related to the review of their rural policy proposals; a broad media campaign involving radio, television and newspapers regarding issues such as how current rural policies exacerbated Mitch's damage; and regional organizing with peasant organizations of other countries to share strategies for revising rural development policies.

SHARE's support of CIDAR has allowed them to develop and introduce to the government alternative rural development strategies. As a result, the Salvadoran Government issued a national agricultural policy proposal in May 2000, which will positively impact 3 million rural Salvadorans. The government proposal included items from CIDAR's platform, including the need to provide for environmental improvements and disaster prevention. As noted in earlier Coalition reports, historically faulty agricultural and rural development policies in El Salvador have helped contribute to the large amounts of damage left in Mitch's wake. In this way, Hurricane Mitch created a window of opportunity for grassroots organizations such as CIDAR to expose previous development activities that had endangered both the environment and the rural poor, making them much more vulnerable to natural disasters.

Coalition funds were also used to support community-based advocacy activities to ensure quality installment of flood prevention infrastructure in the lower Lempa River, an area where the Foundation For Self Sufficiency/La Coordinadora, another Coalition partner, is also active. In coordination with local and international NGOs, as well as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), this organizing helped secure inclusion of flood prevention safeguards in the country's National Reconstruction Plan. SHARE supported community groups on both sides of the Lempa River, San Vicente and Usulután, in their intense advocacy campaigns to oppose relocation and ensure that a flood prevention system will be completed. As a result of this work, the government made public commitments for dike construction, road rehabilitation and other important public services. Local organizations continue to pressure the government to fulfill their commitments and complete the work that was begun in February 2000.

Finally, Coalition support to SHARE also facilitated visits to the lower Lempa region of three US-based engineers from Global Village Engineers, who specialize in flood prevention. The engineers have worked with the communities of Usulután and San Vicente in their efforts to monitor construction of the area's levies, drainage ditches and roads. SHARE provided technical assistance to the communities to form a follow-up committee, and has helped to ensure ongoing communication between the engineers and the groups working on the project.

**The Jewish Coalition's grants for SHARE encouraged support from other US NGOs working in El Salvador, most notably Oxfam America, Catholic Relief Services and Lutheran World Relief. SHARE's work with CIDAR also enabled**

**them to secure \$25,000 from the Public Welfare Foundation for longer-term reconstruction efforts.** In addition, SHARE's support for the affected communities' own advocacy efforts will benefit over 125,000 flood victims by the time the infrastructure-building activities have been completed.

#### **F. Foundation for Self-Sufficiency/La Coordinadora (El Salvador)**

Jewish Coalition assistance to the Foundation for Self Sufficiency has been used to support their local partner and implementing agency, La Coordinadora de las Comunidades del Bajo Lempa y Bahia de Jiquilisco. La Coordinadora focuses its efforts on regional flood prevention and sustainable development, particularly in agriculture.

The first two disbursements were provided with the following goals in mind: to help families produce crops so that they could feed themselves and earn an income from selling the crops; to teach families new techniques so that they could grow crops during the dry season, when there is no risk of losing their crops to floods; and to train farmers in the production and use of organic pesticides and fertilizers, which are less expensive and healthier for individuals and the environment.

Immediately after Mitch, Coalition funds allowed La Coordinadora to establish 29 two-acre agro-ecological plots. More than 1,000 people (229 families), all of whom lost their crops to the storm, have directly benefited from this project. Eighty-three families also received egg-laying chickens, which created much-needed income and provided an important source of protein.

The second grant assisted in setting up an agricultural revolving loan for a micro-enterprise program which helped 53 local farmers purchase seed and supplies to improve and expand their organic production. In addition, nine families in five communities benefited from the introduction of sprinkler pumps to their fields, a new technique which allowed them to farm during the dry season. Three shrimp-farming cooperatives were also provided with assistance to help rebuild their shrimp ponds, which had been damaged by the hurricane.

The third and final grant of \$15,000 to the Foundation was used to construct a flood-proof disaster relief shelter and dormitories in the heart of the flood-prone Lower Lempa Region, Ciudad Romero. This town serves as the primary refuge for neighboring communities during low-level flooding which occurs several times a year, as well as larger storms, such as Mitch. As the funds arrived at the beginning of the rainy season in El Salvador, La Coordinadora waited until January 2001 to begin construction. Two weeks after construction began, the first of three earthquakes hit the country, forcing La Coordinadora to abandon other efforts in order to focus on the 2,000 people in its region

who had lost their homes. Although full recovery from the quakes will take years, work on the shelter and dormitories renewed in April and the buildings are now nearing completion.

The building has two dormitory wings, each of which has three rooms and can house approximately 40 people. Between the two wings of the dormitory is an open-air space, which will be reserved for disaster training and other workshops.

**La Coordinadora reports that in part because of Coalition funds, they were able to garner additional support for their disaster relief activities.** In total, since Hurricane Mitch, La Coordinadora has managed more than \$500,000 in projects, established more than 300 agro-ecological plots and distributed chickens to more than 1,000 families. They noted that Coalition support has also enabled them to begin implementing an “integrated vision of development,” which seeks long-term solutions to reducing their vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters while creating a sustainable economy.

### **G. International Medical Corps (Honduras)**

In the wake of Hurricane Mitch, the International Medical Corps (IMC) deployed an emergency public health team from the US to Honduras to assist the thousands of people who were suffering the storm's affects. After conducting an immediate assessment of municipalities north of Tegucigalpa in the region of Olancho, IMC decided to focus its work in the hard-hit and impoverished areas of Catacamas and Culmi.

With Coalition support, IMC treated more than 5,500 patients at the health center in Catacamas, and at mobile clinics in outlying health posts in Culmi through the deployment of 5 teams of American volunteer medical professionals. Both areas are remote regions and home to marginalized indigenous groups. In addition, IMC treated 1,500 people at a health center in Tocoa; distributed 3 metric tons of donated beans to 3,000 families living in marginalized neighborhoods of San Pedro Sula, the country's second largest city; supported immunization activities for women of child bearing age and children under five years in several remote villages in Olancho; and provided donations of medicines and medical supplies to the Hospital Escuela in Tegucigalpa, the Tierra Santa Orphanage in Siguatepeque, and to the health centers in Choluteca, Olancho and Atlantida.

Following reports of massive spills of agro-chemicals (300-400 barrels) in the south of the country and the exposure of a significant number of people to Mitch-related contaminants, IMC made it a priority to treat rural populations that may have been exposed to polluted water sources. The Jewish Coalition's second disbursement was used to help train local professionals to identify the existence of pollutants released by flooding, and to provide assistance and education to area residents on how to avoid and minimize the pollutants' effects.

IMC evaluated the water supply in Istoca with technical assistance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and in coordination with the Honduran

Ministry of Health, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the American Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In biological samples taken from children and soil samples from the contaminated area, unacceptably high levels of chlorinated pesticides were found.

Based on the results of a Coalition-supported survey that was conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Health, IMC recommended that an educational campaign be conducted with the goal of changing the handling and practices of pesticide users in Honduras. IMC shared the results of its study with SANAA (the Honduran water authorities), the Ministry of Health, PAHO and with NGOs doing related work (CARE, Save the Children-UK and Catholic Relief Services). These entities will incorporate preventative and awareness-raising activities into their reconstruction activities in Choluteca, while municipal technical and management teams will be trained in environmental monitoring and pesticide effects. **IMC has noted that the dissemination of its findings have led to the revitalization of PAHO's Plagsalud Project and other related activities.** One goal of PAHO's project is to help reduce the incidence of pesticide exposure-related illness and to support the implementation of alternatives to present agro-chemical practices.

#### **H. Direct Relief International (Honduras and Nicaragua)**

Immediately following Hurricane Mitch, Direct Relief International (DRI) shipped over \$2 million worth of medical supplies to the worst hit countries of Nicaragua and Honduras. In total DRI sent over 40 shipments with a wholesale value of more than \$8 million to health care facilities in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. Jewish Coalition support has enabled DRI to cover the costs involved in the shipment of 10 of these medical donations, providing assistance to several organizations and institutions in Nicaragua: Casa de la Mujer "Nora Astorga" (Tipitapa), Hospital Ernesto Sequeira (Bluefields), Partners in Health (Puerto Cabezas), and Centro de Salud (Posoltega); and in Honduras: Puerto Lempira Hospital (Puerto Lempira), Honduran Health Exchange (Tegucigalpa), Proyecto Aldea Global (Tegucigalpa; also a Coalition grant recipient) and Project UNIR (Zamorano).

The shipments funded with Coalition support contained a variety of pharmaceuticals, nutritional supplements, medical supplies and medical equipment, which were based on the specific requests and needs of each recipient. Early shipments focused on urgently needed medicines, first aid and surgical supplies and diagnostic equipment while shipments sent during the "reconstruction" phase also contained equipment needed to help rebuild medical facilities, and re-equip hospitals and local clinics.

The 10 shipments, which were completed on August 20, 1999, had a wholesale value of \$2,019,979, and benefited an estimated 500,000 people. Coalition funds were used to cover procurement, shipping and documentation costs of these shipments.

DRI reported that they were able to solicit additional in-kind medical contributions through special appeals. **Also, the results of a Coalition-supported on-site evaluation**

**in Zamorano, Honduras, helped secure a grant of \$30,000 for the continuation of much needed health care services to 72 neighboring communities.**

#### **IV. LESSONS LEARNED FROM HURRICANE MITCH: The Stockholm Declaration and Related Follow-Up**

Over the past year, four prominent NGOs (the Washington Office on Latin America, Oxfam America, Catholic Relief Services and CONGDE, a Spanish organization) examined the international donor community's reconstruction efforts in Central America after Hurricane Mitch. Their research and conclusions were based on the principles articulated and endorsed at the Inter-American Development Bank-sponsored May 1999 meeting of the Consultative Group for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America in Stockholm, Sweden. The conference was a forum for Central American nations to present their plans for "reconstruction and transformation," and also provided an opportunity for donor countries to make pledges and coordinate funding priorities in response to the crisis provoked by Mitch.

In addition, donor nations, Central American countries and multilateral lending and development agencies agreed on a final statement, the "Stockholm Declaration," which set forth the following priorities to guide the reconstruction and transformation process:

- As the overriding goal, reduce the social and ecological vulnerability of the region;
- Reconstruct and transform Central America on the basis of an integrated approach of transparency and good governance;
- Consolidate democracy and good governance, reinforcing the process of decentralization of governmental functions and powers, with the active participation of civil society;
- Promote respect for human rights as a permanent objective. The promotion of equality between women and men, the rights of children, of ethnic groups and other minorities should be given special attention;
- Coordinate donor efforts, guided by priorities set by recipient countries; and
- Intensify efforts to reduce the external debt burden of the countries in the region.

Preliminary results, which came out early this year, have indicated that the devastation of Hurricane Mitch encouraged the international donor community to view the crisis as an opportunity to develop a new approach to disaster relief and reconstruction, one that would integrate long-term poverty reduction and development plans. This marked a departure from traditional approaches that tended to address the immediate needs posed by an emergency without necessarily looking at underlying causes or preventive measures. In this way, the international response to Hurricane Mitch became a case-study and model for future responses to crises.

In addition, the immediate assistance provided by the international donor community helped avert severe political and social turmoil in Central America. USAID, the World

Bank, IDB, ECHO (the European Union's humanitarian arm), and donors quickly committed significant levels of resources to early relief efforts. However, institutional bureaucracy and regulations, technical difficulties and problems experienced with recipient governments often combined to delay disbursements and implementation of assistance during the longer-term reconstruction phase. For instance, the US Congress did not approve an emergency supplemental request for additional funds until May 1999 - nearly seven months after the hurricane.

While donors' commitments to this new approach in disaster response and their efforts to promote civil society participation have been significant, coordination of efforts on the ground has been less effective. There have been notable gaps in assistance for specific populations. At the Stockholm meeting, donors committed to coordinating aid delivery and sharing information, yet, the researching NGOs found that nearly three years after Mitch, there are still large unmet needs in Nicaragua and Honduras. They concluded that donor coordination on the ground needs to be systematized in order to better meet existing needs.

One of the recommendations made by the reporting NGOs is that the donor community should continue to use the Stockholm principles as a framework for developing and implementing reconstruction strategies. They also stressed the importance of donors increasing civil society engagement throughout the relief and reconstruction process.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The human and environmental destruction caused by Hurricane Mitch captured the attention of the international community and prompted an immediate and generous outpouring of emergency humanitarian assistance from individuals, aid organizations, foundations, governments and multilateral financial institutions. Through the establishment of the Jewish Coalition for Hurricane Mitch Relief, the international Jewish community played a role in helping Central America recover from this unprecedented disaster.

While the immediate activities conducted by Coalition partners met emergency medical, food and shelter needs, many Coalition-supported activities addressed longer-term development issues, as well. The Coalition's support of grassroots organizations has also helped to strengthen civil society. This increase in civil society participation in development and disaster relief work is now a priority of major international agencies such as the UN. The UN's Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, "The United Nations once dealt only with Governments. By now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society. In today's world we depend on each other." Coalition support of local organizations post-Mitch has in a tangible way, helped to fortify this voluntary sector in Central America.

In addition, many Coalition partner projects carried out reconstruction efforts in a long-term development framework, focusing on poverty reduction and sustainable development. In this way, Coalition activities are also helping to reduce the vulnerability of the region to future crises.

Jewish Coalition-sponsored projects were consistent with both the goals of Stockholm Declaration, as well as the recommendations resulting from the post-Mitch assessment performed by major international NGOs. Although limited in resources, Coalition assistance has contributed in a significant way to the long-term transformation of the region. It has made a long-term investment in Central America that will continue to benefit its population into the future.