



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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**Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)  
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica**

**DISASTER RESPONSE**



Photo by Ana Mercedes Cea, USAID/OFDA

**Families in Santa María Ostuma, in La Paz, receive USAID/OFDA and other relief supplies just days after floods and landslides affected the area.**

**Assisting El Salvador after the Floods**

USAID/OFDA is providing humanitarian assistance to El Salvador after heavy rainfall associated with tropical depressions and Hurricane Ida caused floods and mudslides that affected much of the country in early November.

As of November 20, USAID/OFDA had provided \$280,000 for relief supplies including temporary shelter materials, hygiene kits, and water containers for affected populations.

Floods and landslides resulted in the deaths of 194 people, caused 80 persons to be reported missing, and displaced more than 15,000 others, primarily in the central departments of

San Vicente, San Salvador, La Libertad, La Paz, and Cuscatlán.

On November 9, the Government of El Salvador (GoES) declared a state of emergency and requested international assistance. On November 10, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Robert Blau declared a disaster in response to the damage caused by floods and landslides.

On November 11, USAID/OFDA airlifted emergency relief supplies valued at nearly \$180,000, including transportation costs, from the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami, Florida, to

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**El Salvador Civil Protection staff help unpack emergency relief supplies provided by USAID/OFDA to assist thousands of families affected by floods and landslides.**



Photo by Ana Mercedes Cea, USAID/OFDA

**DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

**INSARAG Americas Members Meet in Guadalajara, Mexico**

More than 135 urban search and rescue (USAR) team members, firefighters, emergency workers, disaster managers, politicians, and other participants attended the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Regional Group of the Americas annual meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico, from October 27 to 29.

USAID/OFDA provided \$200,000 for the meeting, in addition to assisting with event organization.

Participants reviewed the INSARAG Americas accreditation process for light and medium USAR teams in the region, emergency responses following a Haiti school collapse and an earthquake in Costa Rica, and national USAR mobilization exercises in Guatemala and Colombia.

The meeting also highlighted activities in other INSARAG regions and familiarized participants with the recommendations of the INSARAG Medical, Training, and Search Dog working groups.

INSARAG Steering Committee representatives provided updates on the group's work and information about the INSARAG events planned for 2010.



Photo courtesy of INSARAG Americas

**More than 135 people from the Americas and Europe participated in the annual meeting.**

**DISASTER RESPONSE**

**USAID/OFDA-funded Supplies Distributed in Nicaragua**

In response to the effects of Tropical Storm Ida, which affected an estimated 23,000 people on Nicaragua's east coast in early November, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has distributed relief supplies funded through a trilateral agreement signed last year by the governments of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Additionally, the Nicaraguan Red Cross distributed USAID/OFDA-funded relief supplies pre-positioned in Bluefields in 2005.

## COMING UP

### Uruguay Firefighter Instructor Certification

USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist José Stevanazzi has organized the first workshop in Uruguay to train and certify instructors of the USAID/OFDA-designed Forest Firefighters Course. The training workshop was held from November 16 to 19.

### Urban Search and Rescue Exercises

USAID/OFDA and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) are supporting national urban search and rescue (USAR) exercises in Jalisco, Mexico, from November 27 to 30.

The exercises provide an opportunity for USAR teams to practice their skills, demonstrate strengths, note areas for improvement, and improve coordination with the national emergency management organization. Similar USAR exercises were recently held in Guatemala, Colombia, and Costa Rica (see article below right).

Additionally, USAID/OFDA provided funding and technical support for a search and rescue mobilization exercise in Guayaquil, Ecuador, from November 19 to 21.

### USAID/OFDA EI Niño Planning Meeting

USAID/OFDA staff from the LAC regional office and Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) Andean region disaster risk management specialists will meet in Lima, Peru, on November 30 to review preparedness activities related to the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) weather phenomenon.

The ENSO is causing heavier than normal rainfall and flooding in some parts of the region and drought in other areas.

### USAID/OFDA/LAC Sub-regional Meetings

USAID/OFDA regional advisors and RDAP disaster risk management specialists will meet in the next few weeks to follow-up on annual work plans and discuss disaster response and risk reduction activities in their sub-regions.

The RDAP specialists from Central America and Mexico will meet in San Jose, Costa Rica, on November 23 and 24; those from the Andean region will meet in Lima, Peru, on November 30 and December 1; those from the Southern Cone will meet in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on December 3 and 4; and those from the Caribbean will meet in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on December 7 and 8.

### Caribbean Disaster Management Conference

USAID/OFDA staff from the LAC regional office and the four Caribbean region RDAP disaster risk management specialists will participate in the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency's annual Caribbean Disaster Management Conference in Montego Bay, Jamaica, from December 7 to 11.

The RDAP specialists are Beryl Armbrister, based in the Bahamas; Clive Lorde, based in Barbados; Audrey Mullings, based in Jamaica; and Cecil Shillingford, based in Dominica.

### Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



Tel: (011-506) 2290-4133  
E-mail: ofdalac@ofda.gov  
Internet: www.usaid.gov  
Keyword: ofdalac

## Providing Assistance to El Salvador

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El Salvador. The supplies consisted of 200 rolls of reinforced plastic sheeting, 5,400 ten-liter water containers, 5,088 hygiene kits, and two 5,000-gallon water bladders. U.S. military helicopters and the GoES transported all of the supplies, except the plastic, to the five most affected departments. The plastic will be used along with other construction materials to build temporary shelters for displaced families. The water bladders were installed in two of the hardest-hit communities, San Pedro Masahuat in La Paz and Verapaz in San Vicente.

USAID/OFDA also provided \$100,000 through USAID/El Salvador for the local purchase of emergency relief commodities including 4,000 gallons of Avgas for GoES helicopter and surveillance aircraft, 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel for GoES trucks, 1,100 metal sheets for roofing, 3,000 wooden posts and braces for temporary shelters, 1,000 packages of nails, 300 hammers and saws, 24,000 liters of potable water, and 2,000 mattresses.

USAID/OFDA deployed an assessment team to work with USAID/El Salvador Mission Disaster Relief Officer William Elderbaum, assist with damage evaluations and monitor the distribution of USAID/OFDA-funded relief supplies. The team included LAC Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, El Salvador-based USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist Sergio David Gutiérrez, and four short-term specialists (surge consultants): Ana Mercedes Cea, Johnny Eddie Gómez, Juan Francisco Hernández, and Francisco Rafael Linares.

The team also coordinated with the U.S. Department of Defense (JTF-Bravo), which provided aerial assessments of affected areas, helped to assess bridge damages, and transported emergency supplies to isolated affected areas.

USAID/OFDA will continue to monitor the situation and provide additional humanitarian assistance as needed.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



*Costa Rican USAR team members prepare a search dog to be lifted to the second story of the building where the exercise took place.*

Photo by Auriana Koutnik, USAID/OFDA

## USAID/OFDA Provides Support For National USAR Exercises

USAID/OFDA and INSARAG Americas provided funding and technical assistance for national USAR exercises in Guatemala, Colombia, and Costa Rica in September, October, and November, respectively.

Per agreement with INSARAG Americas, USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialists in each country assisted with event planning, execution, and evaluation. USAID/OFDA also funded the participation of INSARAG Americas evaluators.

The USAR exercises took place in Guatemala from September 25 to 27, in Colombia from October 8 to 12, and in Costa Rica from November 17 to 19.

The countries are evaluating lessons learned during the exercises in order to improve the performance of their teams.

USAID/OFDA plans to support an INSARAG Americas regional earthquake simulation exercise in November 2010.