

SPAIN - Floods

Date: August 25-31, 1983 (FY 83)

Location: The northeast provinces of Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, Alava, Santander, Asturias, Navarra, and Burgos

No. Dead: 45; 50 missing

No. Affected: 500,000; 60,000 seriously affected due to loss of employment; approximately 6,000 homeless

Damage: Total damage to industry, commerce, public services, and housing was estimated at \$3.9 billion. Approximately 900 houses and 5,000 businesses were destroyed, transportation and communications systems were severely disrupted, and beaches were closed due to water contamination.

The Disaster

A week of heavy rain at the end of August 1983 inundated an area in northeastern Spain encompassing seven provinces. The affected zone includes Spain's industrial heartland; extensive loss of inventories and industrial production threatened the country's budding economic recovery. Vizcaya Province, which includes the city of Bilbao, suffered the most extensive damage. In Bilbao and outlying areas, as many as 6,000 persons were made homeless after the flooding destroyed their houses. Several poor barrios were completely wiped out and there was extensive damage to historical sites and churches in the old part of the city. Local airports were closed, road and railway transport came to a virtual standstill, and electric power and telephone service were disrupted in many areas.

Damage to businesses and industries was especially severe. Up to 60,000 people were rendered temporarily unemployed and it was unlikely that many of the businesses would ever reopen. The flood waters also swept chemicals stockpiled at factories into the Nervion River, thereby contaminating local beaches. Fortunately, the contamination did not extend to the drinking water supply.

Action Taken by the Government of Spain (GOS), Local Authorities, and the Spanish Red Cross

A massive GOS assistance campaign was launched after the King and Queen of Spain and Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez visited the flood stricken area on August 28. An interministerial commission consisting of the ministers of Economy and Finance, Defense, and Interior was convened to evaluate flood damage and determine appropriate measures. In addition, the Ministry of Public Works and Urban Affairs announced a program to provide temporary shelter to the homeless. Units of the GOS army, navy, air force, civil guard, and national police were dispatched to assist the Basque regional government in rescue and cleanup operations and two naval destroyers carrying medicines and relief supplies were sent to Bilbao.

The GOS provided \$33.3 million in emergency relief and pledged additional funds for long-term rehabilitation. Those unemployed due to the closure of commercial and industrial firms were put to work on reconstruction projects, and assistance in the form of grants and loans was provided to small and medium-sized businesses.

The regional government, under the direction of Basque President Carlos Garaicoechea, was active in every phase of the relief operation. Local authorities conducted rescue missions, provided food, water, and shelter to the homeless, and worked closely with central government agencies to restore vital services. Major roads were cleared of mudslides and debris and temporary bridges were installed at critical points so traffic could resume.

The Spanish Red Cross (SRC) also responded quickly to the emergency by providing food, medicine, clothing, blankets, heaters, and other supplies to the flood victims. Approximately 2,000 SRC volunteers assisted in the relief effort utilizing 200 vehicles and 50 boats. The SRC also implemented a comprehensive rehabilitation program for the homeless and unemployed. This included moving people from temporary shelters into low-cost rental housing, providing subsistence support in cash and in kind, and setting up mobile sanitary equipment.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

On August 31 the Ambassador to Spain, Thomas O. Enders, declared the flooding to be of a magnitude to warrant USG assistance. After consultation with officials at the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in Washington, the Ambassador announced that \$33,000 would be made available to assist the most severely affected flood victims. This amount and an additional \$167,000 that was subsequently obligated was presented to the Spanish Red Cross to provide basic necessities to the 60,000 people made destitute by the disaster.

TOTAL \$200,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

European Economic Community - contributed \$487,000 in cash for rehabilitation projects and \$54,000 to replace emergency supplies used by the Spanish Red Cross.

Governments

Andorra - provided an unspecified amount of drinking water, milk, and canned food.

Germany, Federal Republic of - provided \$191,216 for humanitarian relief.

Voluntary Agencies

Germany (F.R.) Red Cross - contributed \$7,635 through an institutional transfer.

TOTAL \$739,851