



DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

GUATEMALA - Displaced Persons

Date: November 1982 - February 1983 (FY 83)

Location: The highlands of Guatemala, especially the town of Chisec in the department of Alta Verapaz, and the departments of El Quiche, Chimaltenango, and Huehuetenango

No. Dead: Not reported

No. Affected: Estimates range from 30,000-250,000 displaced persons

Damage: Villages and crops destroyed; displaced persons in need of food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention

The Disaster

As a result of the continuing conflict in the highlands of Guatemala between the Guatemalan military and guerrilla forces, thousands of residents were forced to flee villages which had been destroyed. As of November 1982, an estimated 1,500 people, suffering from malnutrition, malaria, and other health-related problems, had converged on a camp outside Chisec, a town about 68 km north of Coban in the department of Alta Verapaz. In addition to the displaced persons who sought refuge in the camp, about 5,000 people were estimated to remain in hiding in the nearby mountains.

During the previous months, displaced persons had settled in other camps in the highlands. The majority were concentrated in the departments of Alta Verapaz (850 families); El Quiche (800 families); Chimaltenango (700 families); and Huehuetenango (150 families). In January, 1983, it was estimated that at least 30,000 and perhaps as many as 250,000 displaced persons were either residing in camps, living with friends or relatives, or still in hiding throughout the countryside or in Mexico. After months of hiding, many of the displaced returned to their villages or entered camps; often they were in very poor health and in need of immediate medical attention.

Food was also a critical need. Because of crop burning or the absence of villagers during the planting season, reserve village food stocks were practically nonexistent. Until the next harvest in October 1983, the displaced persons would need outside food assistance.

Action Taken by the Government of Guatemala (GOG)

The National Reconstruction Committee (NRC) acted as coordinator for the displaced persons program and provided relief supplies for distribution, while implementation was left mainly to the army and private voluntary agencies. Other agencies involved in relief operations were the National Emergency Committee, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Guatemalan Red Cross. The GOG and local military authorities placed a priority on resettlement in the original villages or new sites close by, hoping to discourage the development of permanent displaced persons camps.

In Chisec, the army airlifted serious malnutrition cases to the National Hospital at Coban and provided basic medical care to individuals in the camps. Through the NRC, the military received roofing materials, food, clothing, and other basic necessities for distribution. Families were given building supplies to construct temporary shelters until they could return to their villages. The NRC also bought 600 MT of food from INDECA, the national food regulatory agency, for distribution to the displaced persons. Because camp residents feared returning to their villages, the military trained civil patrols to assist in maintaining the security of the resettlement areas.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

On December 28, 1982, the Deputy Chief of Mission, Paul D. Taylor, exercised his disaster assistance authority and obligated \$25,000 to the NRC for an emergency relief program in the Chisec area. The funds were to be used to operate a labor-intensive work program, to purchase agricultural and household implements, and to provide emergency medical assistance and supplies.....\$25,000

The Agency for International Development's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) provided funds for inland transportation of food and supplies to displaced persons.....\$15,000

OFDA provided a technical advisor to assess the needs of the displaced persons and help design a resettlement program.....\$6,957

Additional funds were provided by OFDA for further technical support and continuation of the relief program.....\$80,000

TOTAL \$126,957

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community

World Food Program - supplied 5,000 MT of food, value not reported.