



AmericasRelief

AmericasRelief Team
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NEWS REPORT

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AmericasRelief Team stresses that the “Achilles Heel” of disaster relief in the Caribbean Region is the lack of logistics know-how.

Miami, Florida – December 23, 2005. During the 29th annual Miami Conference on the Caribbean and Central America, a panel of Caribbean Basin relief experts was challenged to discuss ways in which the Region must envision sustainable pre-disaster and disaster relief strategies to immediately respond to humanitarian crisis events and to encourage urgent reconstruction efforts, mobilize volunteers, and channel all necessary resources to Internally Displaced Persons. In response, the following comments were made by Dr. Teo A. Babun, Jr., Executive Director of Americas Relief Team:

“At the heart of all humanitarian relief strategies are two priorities: saving lives and reducing human suffering.

The 2005 hurricane season saw seven named storms in the Caribbean that claimed 70 lives and caused more than \$1.5 billion in damages; an estimated 1,300 people were killed in Central America and Mexico during this year's storms. And the region continues to suffer from the 2004 season when four storms killed more than 3,000 people and caused more than \$6 billion in damages to the already shaky economies of the Caribbean basin.

The efforts being made by Caribbean basin governments, to be better prepared for the reality of the hurricane season is commendable. But there is no question that the “Achilles Heel” of disasters in the region is the lack of logistics. The most important thing in a sudden disaster is logistics.

Aid groups and the U.N. are often deluged with donated supplies but struggle to get them where they're needed. Every organization wants to do its own thing, and that creates chaos.

The result is that piles of relief supplies block the airport's tarmac. With dozens of aid groups and governments flying in shipments and each one responsible for unloading its own planes.

In Jakarta, for example, during the Tsunami crisis in Asia, it was well documented that relief supplies were stacked up while waiting for shipment to overcrowded airports, flights were cancelled because of airport congestions, and some collection centers had to stop accepting donations because of massive pile ups.

Likewise, during the 2004 hurricane season the Caribbean region received massive relief efforts, but much of the aid became stacked up at collection centers and the process kept stopping. In the end, this meant that many of the victims did not get the food, water and medical supplies they desperately needed.

The more chaotic conditions become, the more likely it will be that the rule of unintended consequences will apply and that humanitarian relief programming will get drawn into the chaos or even exacerbate it if not properly designed.

It is time to apply logistics techniques to help revolutionize this process by applying logistics know-how to Volunteer Operations and bring order to the chaos and inefficient world of disaster relief.

In response, Americas Relief Team, made up of various Florida-based companies, and humanitarian organizations, have collaborated to form a public-private consortium to help Latin America and Caribbean countries in time of crisis and disasters, in the delivery of relief supplies at little or no cost. Team members have contacts with governmental and non-governmental institutions in the affected countries and help identify the most urgent relief aid needs.

The Team works together in a coordinated basis with the government of the Caribbean, the U.S. government, donating corporations, air & sea cargo carriers, logistics companies, non-governmental experts and others to assess damage when disaster strikes, and then effectively channel emergency relief to the most affected areas.

By the end of the hurricane season in '2004, the Americas Relief Team effort brought together more than 50 companies to address the issues of disaster response, and donated, processed, shipped and distributed more than \$18 million to those with the greatest needs.

This year in October, once again Americas Relief Team members responded in a coordinated and rapid manner to the urgent calls for help from Central American countries. Participating Team members and collaborators provided more than 200-thousand tons of relief aid in an organized and efficient manner to Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Over the past 12 months, we have developed a comprehensive program of conferences and training activities to reach out to the Caribbean region. We are cooperating closely with a number of regional organizations, and major relief players such as the OAS, UN, USAID, Southcom, World Vision, Catholic Charities, and others to develop strategic programs.

We also have reached out to the private sector to help develop the capacity to provide quick response to natural disasters; including the development of shipping & distribution protocols for non-perishable and medical relief supplies. And this year we introduced a program to coordinate relief cargo space available from air and ocean cargo carriers operating in the region.

Problems

In summary, some of the problems that we have identified include:

- Too many agencies (between 800 and 1,000 according to various estimates), without a strategic plan or coordination, are driving the relief efforts,
- The international community often mobilizes duplicating programs,
- There is no clear platform or framework that establishes a system of response, and
- Often the international response is vague, ambiguous, broad and overly ambitious.

Solutions

Some of the most urgent possible solutions include:

- Create a reception and distribution strategy for each country,
- Stopping the practice of unloading the planes directly into trucks; their contents should be transported into organized holding areas for later distribution,
- Coordinating the efforts of the large number of aid agencies that will likely want to participate in the humanitarian response to help reduce the overlapping sectional and geographic jurisdiction, and help programmatic conflicts among agencies, and
- Seek to form a coordination unit with NGOs, the Red Cross movement, and UN agencies operating in the region to deal with the government as a single humanitarian voice.

Example

An example of a possible model in the development stages is a collaborative program between Americas Relief and The Haitian Development Foundation to help establish a National Disaster Management Logistics system for Haiti.

The program will stage critical relief supplies in a fast response regional warehouse, develop shipping & distribution protocols for non-perishable and medical relief supplies, and provide an organized and secure distribution system in Haiti. The objective is to develop the capacity to provide quick response to Haiti, but it could be used as a model for Caribbean and Latin America.

In this system, a “Relief Supply Warehouse” in the U.S. would store items such as: electric generators, gas stoves, detergent, food, hygiene items, and building materials. The warehouse would have a system in place to rapidly procure needed items from NGOs and others. Following a crisis, these items could be shipped to Haiti within 48-hrs.

Smaller and strategically placed “fast response relief warehouses” in Haiti would store a supply of most needed items such as: water purification tablets & units, wool blankets, tents & plastic sheeting.

Another way to help remove the relief aid distribution bottleneck is to help integrate local private sector partners. For instance, how the private sector can contribute to national and regional disaster preparedness, mitigation and response issues is clearly demonstrated through the OFDA-sponsored Disaster Management Alliance project that PADF is implementing in Latin America and the Caribbean through the American Chambers of Commerce.

Affiliated companies and collaborating organizations are building on existing programs and creating new ones to integrate the private sector in community vulnerability reduction under the umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility. In addition, greater attention to business continuity and the integration of community disaster preparedness as a critical part of the business continuity plan benefits everyone. Companies have established programs to train teachers regarding disaster preparedness and emergency response, such as PLIPDECO in Trinidad.

Others have provided health centers and corporate-sponsored and maintained ambulance service, such as Del Oro, S.A. in Costa Rica. Corporate groups are retrofitting critical infrastructure to save lives and livelihoods, such as MERCK and the Mutual Assistance Committee in Colombia.

New and developing initiatives of the Disaster Management Alliance project include establishing Disaster Management Committees in the American Chambers of Commerce to develop a volunteer network to implement a disaster preparedness, mitigation and response protocol. Articulating and coordinating the vast resources and capacities the private sector is able to facilitate immediately following a disaster has immense value in support of high risk communities, national disaster management authorities and the national economies. Additional initiatives include:

- Facilitating training and technical assistance for the development of community disaster plans, synchronized with those of area corporations and practiced through joint corporate/community drills.
- Negotiating deployment of security forces to protect supermarkets and food warehouses from looting immediately following a disaster;
- Guaranteeing employees and their families’ access to food, medicine and gasoline through a purchase order system that provides a reliable plan B when telecommunications, Internet and banking services are interrupted due to disasters.
- Articulating action plans to provide food, water, gasoline, transportation, communication, warehousing and a myriad of other goods and services by mobilizing cash and in-kind contributions.

Through the alliance between PADF, the Association of American Chambers of Commerce of Latina America (AACCLA) and partners such as the Organization of American States, the Americas Relief Team, national and regional NGO’s the individual AmChams and their affiliates are able to participate in an extensive and capable network.

We invite those interested to contact Christine Herridge, PADF’s Director of Disaster Management for more information on how to get involved, and to visit the disaster management section of PADF’s website: www.padf.org.

Finally, we would like to thank the CCAA for hosting these very useful panels to help promote economic development and disaster relief preparedness in the Caribbean Basin. We are excited about the region’s future, and we join all of you in advocating the well being of the people living in the Caribbean Basin.”

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For more information on Americas Humanitarian Logistics Relief Team:
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AmericasRelief Team members include: Carnival Corp., FedEx Latin America, Florida Stevedoring, G.O.A.L., Lucent Technologies, Pharmed Group, POMTOC, and Seaboard Marine. NGO Collaborators include: Feed the Children, Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean (FAVACA), Harvest International, Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), and World Vision South Florida. **AmericasRelief** also collaborates with a number of other companies and non profit organizations.