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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT AND THE VICE PRESIDENT

11-21-98

FROM: Maria Echaveste  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
cc: John D. Podesta  
RE: Update - White House Task Force on Central America  
DATE: November 21, 1998

The purpose of this memorandum is to give you an update on: 1) conditions in the disaster areas; 2) current relief efforts; and 3) upcoming actions. The White House Interagency Task Force on Central America has been organized; I will oversee the effort with the assistance of Eric Schwartz (NSC) and Josh Gotbaum (OMB) who will coordinate day to day activity.

1. **Disaster Update**

- **Honduras** - Emergency food needs are now being met. Most major arteries for land transport are now functioning, reducing the need for helicopter air support.
- **Nicaragua** - A number of key roads currently under repair should be open for travel by 11/23. Air transport of food and medical supplies is still necessary in some areas.
- **Guatemala** - DoD estimates 98 bridges out and 60 percent of roads are inoperable, but electricity is stable and telephone service is operational. Many water sources were contaminated, leaving lack of potable water as the most critical issue.
- **El Salvador** - DOD estimates that 17 bridges and 20 percent of roads are out, but electricity and telephone service are stable.

Assistance priorities include reducing health threats by controlling potential epidemics, ensuring clean water to displaced people, and distributing mosquito nets to prevent dengue and malaria outbreaks as flood waters recede; distribution of seeds and tools and the rehabilitation of damaged crop land; and supporting local relief needs, by providing fuel or other support.

2. **Current Relief Efforts**

- In **Honduras**, \$6 million to continue distribution of food; deliver water chlorination tablets, repair water systems and construct latrines; support medical personnel; procure materials and equipment to repair access roads and to help rebuild damaged homes. This is in addition to the \$2 million provided to restore water systems in Tegucigalpa.
- In **Nicaragua**, \$4 million to distribute seeds in the poorest areas; provide agricultural tools to 18,000 small producers to rehabilitate croplands and agriculture infrastructure; provide medicines and medical supplies benefiting an estimated 850,000 people; support household water purification systems for the estimated 200,000 living in temporary camps or schools; and distribute 50,000 mosquito nets.
- In **Guatemala**, \$1 million to benefit an estimated 100,000 people including distribution of seeds and tools, control of water borne diseases, provision of medicines and supplies to

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treat cholera, dengue and malaria, distribution of hygiene kits.

- In El Salvador, in coordination with other donors, providing assistance to the 10,000 families who are without shelter or household effects; 1500 housing repair kits; latrine kits and agricultural tools.

- **Regionally**

- USAID/OFDA has also provided \$2 million to PAHO to support health, water and sanitation programs.

- 37 DoD helicopters and 15 fixed wing aircraft are in the region, delivering supplies and transporting relief personnel. As of today, these assets have delivered 3.93 million lbs of relief supplies, and flown 522 missions.

- Sixteen additional helicopters are deploying as part of the second package. 1404 U. S. Military personnel are in region. They will be joined by 4380 additional personnel as part of the second deployment. While continuing relief operation, the second package will focus on rebuilding critical infrastructure.

- DoD has delivered 703.3 short tons of private donations, under the Denton program, using 70 air missions and one ship load.

- 17 reserve units from 15 states have supported DoD operations. This includes 165 air missions.

- USAID has established an 800 number to facilitate information to private citizens

- Total aid authorized to date \$268 million

- Treasury announced suspension of debt service until year 2000 for Nicaragua and Honduras

3. **Upcoming Actions**

- USAID will produce PSAs with Mrs. Gore and pitcher Denis Martinez which will be ready to air Thanksgiving week.

- NEC/NSC Deputies meeting to develop further actions on debt relief week of 11/23

- USAID Administrator Atwood and senior military representatives will brief Cabinet members and senior White House staff on 11/23 on relief efforts underway in Central America.

DOJ has extended stay of deportation for nationals for Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala to 1/10/99; however, decision on Temporary Protected Status for these countries will be made by 12/12 or earlier.

- The First Lady, Mrs. Gore and USAID Deputy Administrator Hattie Babbitt will lead a conference with NGOs on 11/24.

- A Codel headed by Senator Domenici has been tentatively scheduled for 12/7-9; Secretary Cuomo has agreed to accompany the Codel.

- The IDB has called a Special Consultative Group meeting on 12/10-11 to address Central America reconstruction and assistance needs; The Presidents from the four countries are scheduled to attend

- USAID and Commerce plan to host a private sector conference on 12/15 to encourage and coordinate private sector contributions and investment in Central America reconstruction.