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INTER-AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (IACNDR)

2015-2019 Meetings of the IACNDR convened by the Office of the Assistant Secretary General in response to Large-scale Disaster Emergencies

(Document prepared by the Office of the Assistant Secretary General

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

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April 2020

In response to a request by Member States, this report has been prepared by the Department of Sustainable Development (SEDI/DSD) of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development, at the request of the Office of the OAS Assistant Secretary General.

Pursuant to OAS General Assembly resolution AG/RES. 2647 (XLI-O/11), paragraph 5.e, which stipulates the necessity “to activate the IACNDR in the event of emergency situations requiring international assistance in the region,” the Assistant Secretary General has been convening meetings of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR) in response to impending and/or in the aftermath of large-scale disaster emergencies.

The various agencies that comprise the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction include:

* The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB),
* The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO),
* The Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH),
* The Pan American Development Foundation (PADF),
* The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA),
* The Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD),
* The Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), and
* The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM).

In the past five years, with the technical support of SEDI/DSD, the Office of the Assistant General has convened meetings of the Committee, in response to the following large-scale disaster emergencies:

* 2015, Tropical Storm Erika that impacted the Commonwealth of Dominica;
* 2016, Ecuador Earthquake; Hurricane Earl that impacted Belize; and Hurricane Matthew that impacted the Commonwealth of Bahamas;
* 2017, Hurricane Matthew that impacted Haiti; the flooding in Suriname; as well as Hurricane Irma and Maria that impacted Antigua and Barbuda and the Commonwealth of Dominica;
* 2018, Eruption of ‘Volcán de Fuego’ in Guatemala; and
* 2019, Hurricane Dorian that impacted the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

In all cases, these meetings sought to ***facilitate*** the exchange of information on the actions taken and response plans put in place by the agencies of the Inter-American System, sub-regional and international partners, as well as OAS Member States and Permanent Observers.

SEDI/DSD supported these meetings by providing analytical information drawn from situation reports published by affected Member States, sub-regional specialized inter-governmental organizations, such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), as well as the UN global unified response mechanism and its unified global appeals, where available. Additionally, SEDI/DSD, through the Office of the Executive Secretary for Integral Development, supported affected Member States in their efforts to assess offers for response from other OAS Member States by identifying suitable response timelines as well as the most effective use of assets and capabilities offered, and foreseeable gaps and needs in later stages of the response. The Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) established a situation room, compiling data and information on the development of the event.

While quantification in terms of monetary contributions or resources deployed has been challenging (given the facilitating nature of the General Secretariat and the Committee’s efforts), it is the assessment of the General Secretariat, with a high level of confidence, that these meetings resulted in collaboration among agencies and Member States, which contributed towards addressing gaps in international response, as well as to minimizing unintended burden on the affected Member States.

The cases below illustrate some tangible and measurable results from those meeting.

2016 Ecuador Earthquake

The Committee met several times to follow up on reports prepared by the IADB and to assess response efforts from OAS Member States and agencies of the Inter-American System. SEDI/DSD mounted a Web site as a single point of entry for the Inter-American System and OAS Member States and partners that compiled all sites provided by the Government of Ecuador. Those sites included information on how to donate, how to offer assistance and who to contact. These sites also included situation reports prepared by the Government of Ecuador with the collaboration and assistance of the UN and international partners.

2017 Hurricane Maria and the Commonwealth of Dominica

The most significant result was the SEDI-Argentine White Helmets Mission that was deployed in December 2017 after SEDI/DSD, in collaboration with the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, conducted a thorough analysis of gaps and needs, through the Office of the Executive Secretary for Integral Development, and in coordination with the Argentine White Helmets Commission.

The mission emanated from a conference call convened by the Assistant Secretary General, as a follow-up to a meeting of the IACNDR. The conference call included the Permanent Representative of Dominica, Permanent Representatives of several OAS Member States, and the President of the Argentine White Helmets Commission. The mission, which included four volunteer experts from Argentina and a SEDI/DSD Principal Specialist, resulted in a report geared towards providing the Government with practical recommendations to rebuild ‘back better’ the country’s water supply systems in an effort to build their resilience and the resilience of the communities that they serve.

2018 Eruption of ‘Volcan de Fuego’ in Guatemala

In the case of ‘Volcan de Fuego’, at the request of the Government of Guatemala, the General Secretariat sent a mission to assess the reception and management of donations and to make recommendations for enhancing transparency and effectiveness. The multi-disciplinary team assembled by the General Secretariat, which included staff members from the Office of the Inspector General and the Department of Planning and Evaluation, as well as the SEDI/DSD Principal Specialist on Disaster Risk Management, prepared and delivered the report, which contained a thorough review of the institutional arrangements of the Guatemalan Response System, its instruments and tools, and the specific context of the disaster emergency.

2019 Hurricane Dorian and the Commonwealth of Bahamas

This event drew the response of several Permanent Observers and OAS Member States. The meeting convened by the Assistant Secretary General allowed the Permanent Mission of the Commonwealth of Bahamas to present the immediate needs and a preliminary report of the aftermath, as well as the points of contact for receiving offers of assistance. Permanent Observers and OAS Member States, as well as specialized agencies of the Inter-American System, namely the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), shared their response and plans for further assistance.

While it would be difficult to quantify the impact of this meeting, specifically given the overwhelming response of the international community, it is reasonable to conclude that the meeting facilitated collaboration among the members of the international community and contributed to minimizing overlaps and overburden on the Government of the Commonwealth of Bahamas.

In addition, the OAS-White Helmets Program has supported several missions of the Argentine White Helmets, many of which coordinated with other agencies of the Inter-American System, mainly the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). (See full report in Annex). While these missions were the result of bilateral requests or acceptance of offers by the affected Member States, the OAS-White Helmets Program allowed for identification of supplementary actions and communication with the Inter-American System.

**ANNEX**

**INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS AND SHIPMENTS OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES**

**2018-2019**

2015

Among the Commission’s many other activities in **2015**, missions were sent to **Dominica** and **The Bahamas** with humanitarian aid and shipments of humanitarian supplies.

Humanitarian Aid Missions

**Humanitarian Aid Mission and Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies to**

**Dominica**

**(September 2015)**

In the wake of the passage of tropical storm Erika in Dominica in late August, the Republic of Argentina, through the White Helmets Commission, collaborated by providing humanitarian assistance.

That assistance involved deploying a team of volunteers comprising three lawyers along with experts in camp and shelter management, supply management, and rescue.

White Helmets also donated humanitarian supplies, including 600 hygiene and cooking packets for all affected homes, to help evacuees return home.

Shipments of Humanitarian Supplies

**Bahamas October 2015**

The Argentine Republic sent humanitarian aid to The Bahamas in early October, when an alert was issued in that country after Hurricane Joaquín destroyed houses and interrupted basic services such as electricity and telecommunications.

Through White Helmets, tablets were shipped to purify 5 million liters of water, a basic necessity that the local authorities and the Pan American Health Organization, which was in charge of the emergency system, had said was urgently needed to deal with the shortage of water that was suitable for human consumption on the islands.

2016

In **2016**, humanitarian aid missions were sent to **Ecuador, Haiti**, **Bolivia,** and **Chile**, and humanitarian supplies dispatched to **Belize.**

Humanitarian Aid Missions

**Humanitarian Aid Mission and Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies to Ecuador**

**(April 2016)**

In response to the devastating earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, which struck Ecuador in April 16, 2016, the Republic of Argentina delivered, in the first instance and through White Helmets, a shipment of humanitarian supplies consisting of: 100 tents to accommodate 7 people each, 930 blankets, 700 hygiene kits, 406 cooking kits, 21,600 masks, 5 boxes of medicines, and 135 boxes of water purification tablets.

The Commission also coordinated the dispatch of an Argentinean Air Force Hercules aircraft with 290 blankets and 300,000 more water purification tablets. This airplane, as well as its crew, stayed in Ecuador for 14 days helping to transport troops and supplies between Quito and the affected area.

A rapid response team was also deployed. It comprised 4 officials and one volunteer from the White Helmets Commission, who are experts in: health and first aid, psychosocial support, rescue, water and sanitation, and shelter management.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission and Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies to Haiti**

**(October 2016)**

In order to help ease the suffering of the Haitian people in the wake of Hurricane Matthew, which left 1.4 million people in need of assistance, White Helmets mounted a Humanitarian Aid Mission to Haiti.

The mission included the Commission Chairman and White Helmets specialized volunteers and medical personnel from the National Health Emergency Directorate, who performed assistance tasks at the Argentine Mobile Hospital in Port-au-Prince. They went afterwards to Jérémie to reinforce the installed operational capacities and primary health care delivery, as well as deliver humanitarian supplies consisting of medicines and water purification tablets.

During the humanitarian mission, the White Helmets Chairman met with the Haitian Foreign Minister, who expressed appreciation on behalf of that country’s President. It should be noted that the Mission was in response to international appeals and requests made by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Also included in the Mission were Juan Carr, a social worker and founder of *Solidaridad* Network, and Carlos “Chapa” Retegui, TD of the men’s hockey team, who also trains young community leaders. They handed out backpacks containing school supplies for Haitian children.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission in Bolivia**

**(December 2016)**

White Helmets sent one volunteer, who was an expert in water and sanitation, to advise the Ministry of the Environment and Water of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in handling the drought in that country.

The drought caused a reduction in the distribution of drinking water in La Paz, whose southern region was the most severely affected. To help with technical expertise, the job of White Helmets was to provide solutions to some of the problems that arose. Guidelines were drawn up on how to organize information on local sources of water, as well as bases for starting work on an emergency drinking water plan. Another important task was to provide guidance on recommendations for the purchase of water treatment plants and getting them to optimal operation.

It should be noted that the water emergency plan that was prepared – for greater resiliency in a water crisis and to make distribution of safe water more efﬁcient – was very useful and covered the stated objectives.

Shipments of Humanitarian Supplies

**Belize (August 2016)**

Following Hurricane Earl, White Helmets sent 9 cases of water purification tablets to Belize. This could treat up to 1,841,400 liters of water and, based on the affected population, could provide a total of 60 days of supply.

2017

In **2017** humanitarian aid missions were deployed in **Peru**, **Chile**, **Paraguay**, **Bolivia,** and **Dominica**, and humanitarian supplies were sent to **Mexico** and **Haiti**.

Humanitarian Assistance Missions

**Humanitarian Assistance Mission in Chile**

**(January – February 2017)**

Following the dangerous forest fires and urban fires that swept the Republic of Chile in January 2017, White Helmets coordinated the 126 Argentinean firefighters who served on Chilean soil helping with firefighting duties.

The contingents of firefighters comprised: 20 firefighters from the Province of Santa Fe, who worked in the commune of Aluhe, 84 km from the city of Santiago; 16 firefighters from the special firefighting forces of the Argentine Federal Police, who also served in Aluhe; 31 firefighters from the Villa Allende de Córdoba Federation of Volunteer Firefighters, deployed in the commune of Curacavi, 45 km from Santiago; another 30 firefighters from the same Federation, assigned to the commune of San José de Maipo; 12 firefighters from the Province of San Juan, who worked in the community of Los Vilos, Coquimbo, in Region IV; and 17 National Parks firefighters.

Argentina was the country providing the most firefighters. On behalf of all the firefighters who were involved, on February 12, 2017 the National Parks brigade participated in the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the Battle of Chacabuco, for which the Presidents of Chile and Argentina were in attendance.

**Humanitarian Assistance Mission in Peru to search for a missing person**

**(January 2017)**

On February 10, 2017, the White Helmets Commission sent a volunteer emotional support specialist to provide emotional assistance to the family members of Rodrigo Segovia, an Argentinean citizen who had disappeared near the Azara River in the town of Quincemil, Peru. This mission, which found Mr. Segovia’s lifeless body, involved the commitment and support of the Peruvian authorities.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission and Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies to Peru (March 2017)**

At the request of the Peruvian government, the Argentine Foreign Ministry, through White Helmets, coordinated a humanitarian mission to help deal with the severe flooding that forced more than 800 Peruvian towns to declare a state of emergency.

For the humanitarian mission, seven volunteers and White Helmets officers were deployed, and an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Defense to send an Argentine Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft. The Argentine humanitarian mission left on March 21, carrying a donation of 40 cases of water purification tablets, enough to treat more than eight million liters of water, and 1,000 blankets.

The Peruvian Foreign Minister and other civilian and military officials received the mission at the air base adjoining Jorge Chávez International Airport. White Helmets also met informally with that country’s President.

The humanitarian mission held a meeting with the Peruvian Emergency Operations Center, and was assigned to *La Libertad* region, which had been severely affected by natural disasters. The Hercules C-130 aircraft and its crew were also assigned to help with the air bridge set up to link cities and communities that were cut off in northern Peru with Lima, transporting food and machinery, and taking the sick and the elderly as well as children from the affected areas.

Once in *La Libertad*, White Helmets made itself available to the local authorities. A coordination platform was thus established and the community and authorities were trained in emergency response. Work was also done to put a “Safe Water System” in place for distributing drinking water. The governor of *La Libertad* lauded the work of White Helmets at an official ceremony. Later on, the mission traveled to the outskirts of Lima to assist residents in the municipality of Chosica, an area that was severely affected and cut off by natural disasters.

The mission was scheduled to end on Tuesday, March 28, and was extended at the request of the Peruvian authorities until Friday, March 31, when the C-130 Hercules returned to the Armed Forces Palomar base. White Helmets received an award from the Governor of *La Libertad* Region for its humanitarian work.

**Humanitarian Assistance Mission in Peru to search for a missing person**

**(May 2017)**

Following the disappearance of Argentinean citizen Federico Farías in the vicinity of Aguas Calientes, near Machu Picchu, White Helmets deployed volunteers to assist the local authorities with their search. Peruvian officials provided extensive support on that occasion but, unfortunately, the Argentinean national was found dead.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission and delivery of humanitarian supplies to Paraguay**

**(June 2017)**

As a result of the situation affecting Ñeembucú Department, where thousands of families were affected by flooding from persistent rainfall, Argentina – through the White Helmets Commission – sent two Argentinean Army helicopters, as well as water purification tablets to meet the needs of 12,000 families for two months.

**Humanitarian Assistance Mission in Bolivia**

**(August 2017)**

White Helmets helped mitigate, control, and put out the August 9 forest fire in the Sama mountains, 12 kilometers from the city of Tarija in southern Bolivia. This forced the local authorities to evacuate the affected families and suspend school in the neighboring communities and in the city.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission in Dominica**

**(December 2017)**

In 2017, the Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica to the OAS delivered his Government’s request for technical assistance in the area of humanitarian aid in view of the damage caused by Hurricane Maria, which devastated that country. The OAS Assistant Secretary General chaired the October 20, 2017 meeting at which White Helmets was asked about the possibility of coordinating such a mission.

A joint mission was then deployed to assess the damage and examine the critical infrastructure needs, under the OAS program. The mission was conducted from December 6 to 16, 2017, and comprised three expert engineers who were White Helmets volunteers and accompanied by two coordinators, one from the Commission and the other from the OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI).

The team inspected the drinking water supply, transportation, treatment, and distribution systems, and met with Dominica Water and Sewerage Company (DOWASCO) management and engineers, and with officials from the Crisis Management Unit (CMU) established by the United Nations in response to a request from that country’s Prime Minister.

They assessed the impact and damage to the system; held a meeting to get feedback on observations and recommendations, and submitted a comprehensive assessment report with recommendations to the country’s authorities and the DOWASCO authorities.

Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies

**Haiti (March 2019)** A delivery of humanitarian supplies was made, consisting of 300 kg of donations, including clothing, toiletries, and school supplies, in line with the reconstruction priority in Haiti. TECHO Haiti was in charge of the final distribution of donations.

**Mexico (September 2017)** In response to the powerful September 2017 earthquake, White Helmets sent a 4,200 kilogram shipment of humanitarian supplies, along with one of its logistics experts. Guided by the needs outlined by the Mexican government, a shipment was sent with tablets to purify up to 6 million liters of drinking water, 1,500 blankets, 312 cooking kits, and 300 cleaning kits.

**Peru (December 2017)** White Helmets coordinated a donation from the Ministry of Health of Argentina to the Ministry of Health of Peru, consisting of 10 anti-scorpion serum treatments (50 vials).

2018

In **2018**, humanitarian assistance missions were undertaken in **Cúcuta** – on the Colombia-Venezuela border – as well as in various countries in **South America** and **Central America,** on board the USNS Comfort. Meanwhile, shipments of humanitarian supplies were made to **Vanuatu**, **Guatemala**, and **Indonesia**, and supplies stored at the **Regional Humanitarian Assistance Logistics Center** warehouses in **Panama**.

Humanitarian Aid Missions

**Humanitarian Aid Mission in Cúcuta**

**(June - December 2018)**

As part of a collaboration strategy agreed on by the Governments of Argentina and Colombia, four teams of doctors and primary healthcare specialists – put together and coordinated by White Helmets – delivered humanitarian medical care in the border town of Cúcuta, as reinforcement from the local health system of the Department of North Santander, in view of the Venezuelan migration issue. The mission was deployed from June 23 to December 3, 2018, and treated a total of 5,160 patients.

In their care delivery the health teams, comprising pediatricians, gynecologists, clinical physicians, psychologists, and nurses, gave priority to pregnant women, infants, children, and adolescents under 17 years of age, who had regular migration status or were registered with the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV).

Seven boxes of water purification tablets were handed over in the meantime to the head of water and sanitation at the Health Institute in Villa del Rosario, North Santander Department, to treat 1.5 million liters of water on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

**Humanitarian Aid Mission on board USNS COMFORT (October - December 2018)**

Between October 10 and December 18, 2018, the Argentine Republic, through White Helmets, participated in the humanitarian effort on board the USNS COMFORT that provided health care at the ports of Esmeraldas (Ecuador), Paita (Peru), Turbo and Riohacha (Colombia), and Puerto Castilla (Honduras).

White Helmets contributed altogether 13 Commission volunteer health professionals to this initiative. They worked in successive cohorts integrated into the multidisciplinary health corps on board the ship.

In total, 26,701 patients and 599 surgeries were the positive impact left by the hospital ship’s calls at the five ports (4,005 in Esmeraldas, 6,229 in Paita, 5,450 in Turbo, 4,943 in Riohacha, and 5,475 in Puerto Castilla), where mainly locals and, to a lesser extent, migrants, were served.

Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies

**Peru (January 2018).** Water purification tablets were delivered to City Hall in Monsefu, Chiclayo Province.

**Guatemala (June 2018).** In response to the emergency caused by the eruption of the Fuego volcano in June 2018, White Helmets sent humanitarian supplies to Guatemala, per the request made by that country to the international community. The shipment consisted of personal hygiene kits.

**Storage of supplies in Panama (December 2018)**

During the inauguration of the Regional Humanitarian Assistance Logistics Center in Panama (CLRAH), White Helmets stored humanitarian supplies at the CLARAH, occupying the space used by the Commission in the World Food Program (WFP) warehouse, to facilitate disaster rapid response efforts, one of the priorities for which the Center was designed. A total of 110 boxes of water purification tablets and 1,000 blankets were stored there.

2019

In **2019**, Humanitarian Assistance missions were deployed in **Mozambique** and **Bolivia**, as well as in several countries in **South America**, **Central America**, and **the Caribbean,** on board the **USNS Comfort**. Humanitarian supplies were also stored in the **Colombian National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD)** warehouses.

Humanitarian Aid Missions

**Humanitarian Aid Mission on board the USNS COMFORT (June - November 2019)**

The White Helmets Commission was invited back by the United States Southern Command to join the humanitarian mission on board the USNS COMFORT, similar to what was done before in 2018. The new humanitarian mission ran from mid-June to November 18.

During the five-month mission, the hospital ship called at ports in 12 countries in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean: Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica. Its aim was to provide local communities with medical assistance, based on the needs the host countries themselves had identified, and to help ease the pressure on the medical systems in states hosting Venezuelan immigrants.

White Helmets provided a total of 14 health professionals, who had extensive experience and technical qualification for operations of this nature.

**Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance with the Amazon fires**

**(August 2019)**

In response to the appeal launched by the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for international cooperation, White Helmets contacted the Executive Secretariat of the National Integrated Risk Management System (SINAGIR) – which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces then coordinated the operational aspects with their Bolivian counterpart and sent an advance operations coordination team that arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra on Saturday, August 31.

White Helmets was in constant communication with the Argentine Embassy in Bolivia and with the Consulate in Santa Cruz de la Sierra on coordination of Argentine assistance to support Bolivia. After the fires were put out, the Argentine Armed Forces team returned home on October 17.

Although the Federative Republic of Brazil did not launch an appeal for international assistance with the Amazon fires, that country’s Embassy in Argentina informally approached the White Helmets Chairman about the possibility of Argentine assistance. The inquiry was referred to the Federal Fire Management System, through the Executive Secretariat of the National Integrated Risk Management System (SINAGIR), which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The White Helmets chief also stayed in touch with the officer in charge of humanitarian affairs at the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), with a view to offering to send Argentine firefighting experts who would go with their own equipment. The ABC officer said the Brazilian emergency coordination committee would be notified of Argentina’s assistance offer, along with others. No response to the Argentinean offer was received.

Shipment of Humanitarian Supplies

**Shipment of supplies from Panama to Colombia (April 2019)** Through White Helmets, the Argentine Foreign Ministry coordinated a shipment of humanitarian supplies consisting of foodstuff donated by the *Lomas del Sol* company. The shipment included cooking oil, canned food, rice, lentils, and raisins – 26 tons in total. The donations arrived at the Port of Cartagena de Indias in Colombia on May 28 and were stored in National Disaster Rick Management Unit (UNGRD) warehouses.

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