

TÉLÉCOMS SANS FRONTIÈRES

Guatemala Floods

4 october 2005 - 15 october 2005



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1. Evaluation of the catastrophe

Initial situation and analysis :

- Initial General Situation :

4/10 :

Intervention of TSF in order to conduct an evaluation in Salvador, coordinating with COEN - Salvador National Emergency Commission.

There was no need for telecommunications.

5/10 :

As a result of heavy rains in Central America, a state of emergency was declared in Guatemala by the government.

The following day, TSF intervened in Guatemala in coordination with CONRED (National Committee for Disaster Response) in Guatemala.



- Situation on the ground :



The information communicated by CONRED (National Committee for Disaster Response) on October 7th resulted in the following statistics :

Deaths : 153

Deaths in Santiago d'Atitlan (confirmed by the fire service) : 23

Injured : 53

People affected by the disaster : + 60,000

Displaced in shelters : 31,407

Houses damaged : 4293

Houses destroyed : 97

Communities affected by the disaster : 288

Shelters : 228

** intermediate statistics : On October 7th., only 10% could be properly evaluated because of communication problems and difficulties of access in the disaster zone. CONRED, concentrating on rescue efforts was not able to assess all affected areas.*

Land slides :

The areas most affected (along the Chiapas frontier and land towards the interior) are the following communities:

- San Marcos
- Huehuetenango
- Quetzaltenango
- Retalhulea

Flooding :

The same areas + the communities on the Pacific coast :

- Suchitepequez
- Escuintla

The economic impact :

Cultivated land has been severely damaged by the rains.

Road networks and logistics :

Difficulties for transport due to land slides and thick mud. Several villages are isolated and relief teams access to the zone is very difficult.

Problems with fuel supply make very difficult Helicopters flights and road transports.



War zones / Security

:No security problems were reported.

Telecommunications / Electricity :

Electricity and telephone are cut. Cell phones could only be recharged when there was fuel for the generators.

Isolated zones with telecommunications problems are

- San Marcos
- Altiplano (Sibinal-Tacana)

CONRED expressed that communications were needed in order to transmit information to the control centre and ease the coordination of rescue efforts in the two zones mentioned above.

Solar panels could not work due to lack of light caused by the heavy rains.

2. Locality of the mission



Base 802722AI (C00113) 12-00

3. The mission

Emergency response by Télécoms Sans Frontières :

- 5 technicians specialising in emergency telecommunications
- 3 GAN M4 (data transmitters), 7 Mini-M (satellite telephones), laptop computers, etc.

TSF put together 2 teams to cover simultaneously two areas particularly affected but access was difficult in the zones assigned to TSF

- San Marco
- Tacana



3.1 San Marcos :

3.1.1 Installation of a telecommunications centre

This centre was located in the heart of the coordination center.

The equipment made available was as follows :

- 1 data transmitter
- 1 MiniM
- 2 laptops
- fax & printer

Users :

- Comision de Planificacion y Enlace CONRED : Internet, email
- Mancuerna (Project supported by Spanish Cooperation)
- Accion contra el hambre : Internet, email
- The Church : Internet and email : information on the refugees in the churches
- NGO Tacana : Internet & email

Conclusions concerning telecommunications centre:

The most user was Accion contra el hambre (ACH)

No other NGOs present at rescue teams meetings where decisions were taken concerning the emergency situation with CONRED and the Town Hall

The centre at Gobernacion was closed and moved to the office of ACH until 14/10, the only organisation interested in using it.

3.1.2 Humanitarian telephones :

Shelters around San Marcos:

9/10 visits to the shelters in

- El ojo de Agua
- Dolores
- Piedra Grande

These are the areas most affected by the most severe land slides in San Marcos.

No need for telecommunications : calls already made as telephone was working.

Shelters in San Marcos:

Seven shelters had been covered allowing refugees to contact their family to give them news and maybe asking them for help. Sometimes, some refugees were using the telephone for the first time in their life.

Migrants without the correct papers caught by the storm abandoned the idea of crossing over into America and wanted to go back to their country of origin. Large telecommunications needs encountered in this domain.

Problems encountered during visits to the shelters :

Most people left during the day to clean up their houses and returned at night to the shelter, leaving only women and children there during the day.

Towns surrounding San Marcos 8/10:

TSF went to the villages around San Marcos because no communication with them was possible.

Town of San Rafael.

The town of San Rafael is located 25 kms away from San Marcos, the road is badly damaged (56 land slides between San Marcos y San Rafael). The trip lasts around one hour. The town had no electricity and telephone from the 3 October to the 10 October. The two shelters had been covered by TSF allowing refugees to satisfy their telecommunication needs.

3.2 Tacana (Altiplano) :

9/10 the second team arrived in San Marcos from Guatemala.

2 days to wait with Guatemalan firemen and Cuban doctors for the Army because of bad weather.

The first helicopter arrived on 10/10, first distribution of food in the area.

Although being a village totally abandoned since the first day of the disaster, Tacana remained a well-stocked village, with much trade (cash flow and illegal traffic with Mexico) and restaurants which were open and serving food.

Humanitarian phoning operations

Shelters in Tacana:

People had come from the Canton de Cua area, 20 minutes on foot from Tacana.

9 shelters were listed and 814 calls were made. As from 11 October 2 shelters and 2 churches are opened and telecommunications needs were satisfied.

Problems encountered:

Access to and distribution of food supplies to communities only possible on foot. The most isolated zones are treated with first priority. They are :Nuevo Palmar and Sibinal.

Nuevo Palmar :

The access to the village can be done only on foot (4 hours)

A call centre had been set-up in the town hall to replace the telephone network (no electricity due to the lack of fuel).

On Tuesday October 11th, the communities had received no food supplies.

They used what was left from their harvests, which was sufficient for the first few days after the disaster. Good community organisation and support amongst the communities. The head of families preferred to clean their homes rather than go look for food from their distribution centres.

The café crops along the Mexican Border were destroyed by the passage of Hurricane Stan.

Rivers have been contaminated by corpses. Lack of medicines supplies.

The population must go to the mountains to obtain clean water.

Sibinal

Access to Sibinal can be done by car then, on foot (2 hours walk)

On October 11th. the telephone is fixed and working..

The presence of TSF is not necessary, the team returns to Tacana.



[3.3 End of TSF's mission](#)

13/10

TSF leave San Marcos

14/10

TSF arrive in Guatemala city by helicopter

15/10

Return of the 2 teams to their base in Managua (Nicaragua)

4. Conclusions

Guatemala has a very good cell phone network, even in isolated areas of the country. The network always more or less functioned, with some alternation between the various operators.

The lack of energy (electricity) was the major problem affecting the cell phones, and the return of energy supplies enabled these to be re-established very quickly.

The major problems encountered by the TSF and other rescue teams in general were the adverse weather conditions which, continuing for several days after the initial disaster, hampered the use of helicopters in isolated areas.

Once on site, the telecoms networks were quickly re-established - land lines, cell phones and the Internet.

TSF left Guatemala on October 15th.

