



BROOKINGS



# REPORT

## CENTRAL AMERICAN WORKSHOP ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

San Salvador, El Salvador, April 26 to 30, 2010

**CONTENTS**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Workshop Implementation and Results.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Concrete Actions for Immediate Follow-up.....</b>	<b>8</b>

# I - INTRODUCTION

## A WORKSHOP FOR REFLECTION ON DISASTER ASSISTANCE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The “Central American Workshop on Human Rights in Disaster Management” was held in the city of San Salvador from April 26 to 30, 2010, within the framework of the Central American Integration System (SICA, by its Spanish acronym).

This workshop was organized by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings), El Salvador’s Directorate General of Civil Protection, and the Executive Secretariat of the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC, by its Spanish acronym), with financial support from Brookings.

Officials from six countries participated – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama – representing various institutions such as CEPREDENAC’s national systems, Offices of the Prosecutor for Human Rights, Humanitarian Rescue Units of the Central American Armed Forces Conference, Fire Brigades, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and other first responder institutions such as the Green Cross and Comando de Salvamento. There were also representatives from the Executive Secretariat of CEPREDENAC, the United Nations (UN), and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

Prior to this workshop there were other workshops organized in Central America by Brookings, the Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (RSG), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):

- Regional workshop in Panama in May 2008, organized by OCHA, Brookings, and RSG
- Regional workshop in Guatemala in May 2009, organized by CEPREDENAC, CONRED, Brookings, and RSG
- National workshop in Nicaragua in August 2009, organized by OCHA

These workshops introduced the issue of human rights protection in the response to natural disasters with a particular focus on the Operational Guidelines on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster.<sup>1</sup> The guidelines, developed by the RSG and adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), provide first-line disaster responders with the guidance they need to ensure protection of the human rights of people affected by a natural disaster.

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<sup>1</sup> Protecting Persons Affected by Natural Disasters – Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Operational Guidelines on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, Washington, DC, 2006.

The workshop was opened by El Salvador's Director General of Civil Protection, Mr. Jorge Meléndez; the Co-Director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, Dr. Elizabeth Ferris, and; the Executive Secretary of CEPREDENAC, Mr. Iván Morales. All three pointed out that people affected by disasters must have the same rights and freedoms as residents in areas that are not affected by these events, and that they must not be the target of any discrimination. In addition, more must be invested in prevention programs, within the framework of comprehensive risk management policies.

The participants had the opportunity to participate in both thematic and case-specific presentations on each country. In a field study visit they compared and analyzed the relationship between the general principles of human rights and the on-the-ground reality faced by municipalities of the San Vicente department that were affected by the tropical depression that hit El Salvador as a result of Hurricane Ida in November 2009.

Among the most important results was the shaping of the country proposal to pursue this subject in the national arena. This is intended to begin in the second half of this year with the support of the Brookings Institution.

## **II - BACKGROUND ON THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CEPREDENAC**

At the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007, as part of the planning and consultation process for developing the framework of CEPREDENAC's Preparedness and Response Program Area (APPR, by its Spanish acronym) with technical officials from all CEPREDENAC member countries, seven regional objectives were identified and two cross-cutting themes were considered – gender equality and intercultural respect. However, the issue of human rights in connection with emergency and disaster preparedness and response was not considered.

When what was then CEPREDENAC's Board of Directors (and, in accordance with CEPREDENAC's new Constitutive Agreement, is now the Counsel of Representatives) approved CEPREDENAC's APPR. However, this level of policy-making also did not take on the issue of human rights and disaster preparedness into account in approving the APPR.

The importance of including this topic in the implementation of CEPREDENAC's APPR was identified in May 2009 when CONRED's Executive Secretariat requested technical assistance from CEPREDENAC's Executive Secretariat in order to develop a workshop in Guatemala on the issue with the support of the Swiss government and Brookings.

Within the framework of carrying out the Regional Plan for Disaster Reduction (PRRD, by its Spanish acronym), CEPREDENAC's Constitutive Agreement, [and] the Central American Policy for Integral Disaster Risk Management (PCGIR, by its Spanish acronym), and for the purpose of making progress and actions promoted by CEPREDENAC known and obtaining input for the formulation of the 2010-2013 Multi-year Plan, as well as consolidating inter-institutional

coordination, working meetings were held in CEPREDENAC member countries in which the five programmatic areas of CEPREDENAC and the PCGIR were presented.

As a result of these working meetings in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama, it was agreed to create two regional operational objectives in addition to the seven previously included. These were:

8. **To promote the subject of Human Rights in Emergency and Disaster Management** with the task, among others, of holding a Central American meeting regarding emergency and disaster management and human rights
9. To develop and promote the Central American strategy for early recovery

This workshop was intended to implement the principal task identified in the new objective 8.

## **III - WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS**

### **Workshop objectives**

To discuss regional operational objective 8 “To promote the inclusion of human rights and gender focus in emergency and disaster management.” Specifically, it aspired to:

- Raise awareness among civilian and military field workers regarding human rights in the framework of emergency and disaster preparedness and response.
- Share experiences between field workers and officials from the Offices of the Prosecutor for Human Rights on the subject
- Agree to promote regional operational objective 8 from CEPREDENAC's Preparedness and Response Program Area (APPR) plan: “To promote the inclusion of human rights and gender focus in emergency and disaster management” within the framework of the contents to be developed through CEPREDENAC's APPR, in accordance with the 2010-2013 Multi-year Plan

### **Workshop methodology**

By using an interactive methodology, the workshop was structured to allow participants to assimilate theoretical concepts, learn about specific cases of the countries represented in the workshop, and participate in field visits.

It was structured as follows:

- Presentation and discussion of the normative framework of protection, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Operational Guidelines on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster, and the Sphere Project
- Presentation and discussion of the issue of gender equality in emergency response

- Presentation and discussion of principal challenges such as shelter management and the search for durable solutions to forced displacement
- Presentation on the background, achievements, and gaps on this issue in Central America
- Presentation and discussion of cases from each CEPREDENAC member country
- Three working group sessions in order to identify opportunities to implement the IASC's Operational Guidelines, to analyze national situation with regard to the subject, and to prepare a questionnaire to be used during the field visits on human rights and disaster response to six municipalities of the San Vicente department affected by the tropical depression resulting from Hurricane Ida in November 2009

Participants had the opportunity to work in three different sessions of working groups. On the first day, groups were organized on the basis of expertise, e.g. fire fighters from the six countries. On the second day, participants met in national groupings and on the final day groups were organized across nationalities and areas of expertise.

The field visit highlighted six sites in the department of San Vicente that were affected by the tropical depression caused by Hurricane Ida. The principal objective of this field visit was to connect theory with reality. The participants prepared a questionnaire that allowed them to analyze the issues that need to be considered in human rights protection in disaster management. They interviewed affected people, local authorities, and local civil protection committees. Each group prepared a report on its observations regarding the visit and presented the reports in plenary session.

Although the participants came from different countries and institutions, some common themes arose in the working groups and plenary discussions:

### **Problems identified**

- Lack of a culture of prevention and risk management
- Lack of knowledge and awareness about human rights by civil protection and rescue workers
- Security problems in the shelters
- Difficulties in relocating communities in dangerous situations (e.g. lack of confidence in the government, the fact that people do not want to abandon their property)
- Discrimination for political reasons resulting in the politicization of assistance
- Lack of economic resources and tools on the part of the rescue workers
- Lack of information regarding the communities and their vulnerabilities, especially problems in responding appropriately to indigenous groups
- Problems in the distribution of assistance – sometimes people who do not need assistance take it or use it inappropriately
- Need for coordination – everyone is looking out for their own interests
- Problem of protection of property in cases of evacuation
- Insufficient operational cooperation between human rights defense institutions and civil protection and rescue institutions
- Lack of psychological care for responders

### Measures to take

- Creation of an adequate normative framework and develop natural disaster prevention and response policies, including by making sufficient resources available for the preparation and implementation of these plans
- Advocacy for the necessary political support to prepare and implement normative frameworks and prevention and response policies
- Improvements in communication and planning systems
- Investment in education and training and in creating awareness with regard to prevention and better dissemination of existing information
- Increased transparency in use of funds and establishing accounting systems
- Training and empowering communities through municipal structures (such as local emergency committees)
- Formation of evacuation brigades to facilitate relocation processes when necessary
- Consideration of the possibility of strengthening cooperation in the region (e.g. establishing barracks in the region with rescue equipment, setting up operational groups at the regional level)
- Establishment of psychological care mechanisms for rescue workers
- Taking advantage of CEPREDENAC commissions to increase people's awareness of the relationship between human rights and natural disasters
- Strengthening the role of the human rights agencies with regard to natural disaster response monitoring

### Results achieved by the workshop participants:

- They became familiar with the concept of human rights protection in situations of natural disaster, with the normative frameworks of protection, and with the tools for implementing the concepts.
- They analyzed the challenges of protection in specific regional situations.
- They developed responses to these challenges.
- They are aware of what each actor can contribute to these responses.
- They are familiar with the framework for durable solutions.
- They analyzed various aspects of the response to Hurricane Ida from the perspective of human rights protection.
- They are able to identify the challenges of protection in specific situations and to formulate responses to those challenges.

## IV - RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Training** activities should be promoted in order to respond to the lack of awareness of human rights in the organizations that make policy, that plan, and that first respond to natural disasters, including training processes for **mayors** and municipal authorities.

In this regard, it is important to seek tools (such as Guatemala's recommendation to convene a national meeting for the purpose of producing a manual and training human resources that can be facilitators in the municipalities of the country).

2. Promote appropriate **laws and policies** that incorporate human rights. The promotion of these laws and policies should include resources/national budgets to support disaster prevention and response within the framework of the subject of human rights, and **protocols between the various actors** that work in disaster prevention and response.
3. Consider inclusive **planning** processes that incorporate a human rights perspective, for example, by developing appropriate responses to indigenous communities.
4. Affected communities should **participate** more in the planning and implementation processes.
5. There should be a **regional forum**, coordinated by CEPREDENAC, for sharing experiences, developing common strategies, and exploring possibilities for practical cooperation between different sectors and between the countries of the region.

## IV - CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE FOLLOW-UP

The need to pursue this subject in order to promote it at the national and regional level, in accordance with APPR operational objective 8, was a concrete outcome of this workshop. The participants have suggested beginning a process for **dissemination of this subject**, beginning with the national level. Therefore it is suggested that:

- National workshops will be held in the second half of 2010, similar to the one held this time on the regional level, and
- Over the next year, there will be a national symposium in each country to explore the possibilities of incorporating more human rights perspectives in the laws, policies, and practices of each country. Given the context, these meetings may include government officials, aid workers, human rights organizations, non-governmental organizations, representatives of affected groups, and/or municipal authorities.
- In 2011 – after the national dissemination workshops and national symposia – a regional-level conference should be convened to share experiences and explore possibilities for increasing regional cooperation.