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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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**Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica**

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo by Fly Productions for USAID/OFDA

Disaster management specialists working through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program provide training and technical assistance in disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Above, Luisa Alfaro helps firefighters in Ecuador conduct a national exercise in late 2008; below, Pedro Soto helps the Mexican Red Cross respond to Hurricane Wilma in 2005.

New Contract Announced for Regional Program

In June, USAID announced a new contract for the implementation of the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides disaster response, preparedness, and risk reduction training and technical assistance throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

USAID awarded the five-year contract to Washington, D.C.-based International Resources Group (IRG), an L3 Communications company that has successfully implemented the RDAP since 1998.

Established in 1989, the RDAP is the primary vehicle for USAID/OFDA's support for disaster risk management and response in the region. Through the years, given the increased capacity of LAC countries, the RDAP has shifted from a strictly instructional approach to providing more technical assistance for disaster preparedness planning, strengthening the role of national organizations in disaster management, and facilitating inter-institutional coordination. Under the new contract, the RDAP will place increased attention on disaster risk

reduction (DRR) activities such as safeguarding livelihood assets, preventing shelter loss, and building capacity for disaster preparedness and response. USAID/OFDA will assist in the incorporation of DRR curricula in schools and universities, promote the incident command system for efficient multi-agency responses to adverse events, and assist with search and rescue and pre-hospital care training, among other activities.

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Photo courtesy of Pedro Soto, USAID/OFDA

APPRECIATION

Regional Office Staff Thank Ambassador Peter Cianchette

The staff of the USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) extend a heartfelt thank you to Peter Cianchette, former U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica, for the strong support he provided the office during his tenure.

Cianchette returned to the United States in late June after completing a year-long stint in Costa Rica that included, among other activities, helping to coordinate the U.S. Government's humanitarian assistance following the magnitude 6.2 earthquake on January 8.

U.S. military and USAID/OFDA-contracted helicopters helped to support Costa Rican air operations to evacuate hundreds of people from isolated areas near the quake's mountainous epicenter, 10 km east of Poás Volcano.

USAID/OFDA wishes Mr. Cianchette the very best in his new endeavors.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in San Jose

Peter Cianchette, U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica (left), meets with USAID/OFDA staff during the response to the earthquake.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Disaster Management Alliance Launches Coordination Website

In June, the USAID/OFDA-sponsored Disaster Management Alliance at the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) launched a new platform for strengthening disaster management in the region: PlanforDisasters.org.

The new website promotes increased cooperation between the public and private sectors for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response, and recovery. Visitors are encouraged to register on the site to take advantage of all its features.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of Manuel Rodríguez, IFRC

USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan (left) met with Ariel Kestens, head of the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), at the PADRU warehouse in Panama on June 23 to celebrate the start of a \$1 million grant to IFRC funded in equal parts by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The funds are being used for the purchase of non-food emergency supplies for distribution throughout the region as needed after disasters.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Caribbean Adapts Tsunami Protocols

Four Caribbean states are adapting tsunami warning protocols to local conditions and testing these protocols under a USAID/OFDA-sponsored Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System (TCHWS) project being implemented by the Caribbean Disaster Response Agency (CDERA).

These four Caribbean states are adapting the protocols in an effort to accelerate the region's ability to respond to tsunamis and other coastal hazards, according to CDERA. The protocols are rules and guidelines that determine not only the monitoring and communication of hazard information, but also the process of training public officials, refining communication methods, and increasing public awareness so that communities can respond appropriately in times of disasters.

National disaster managers from the region became familiar with the model protocols at a workshop held in Grenada in April. Additional workshops were held in Barbados on June 29 and 30, and in Antigua on July 7 and 8. A fourth workshop is scheduled to take place in Jamaica on July 16 and 17.

As part of the process, CDERA is helping to develop public awareness and educational materials as well as a Protocol Development Guide to assist countries in sensitizing their populations and modifying the generic protocols and standard operating procedures for local use. An estimated 2.5 million people in CDERA states live in coastal communities at risk of tsunamis and other coastal hazards.



National disaster managers from throughout the Caribbean participate in the tsunami protocol workshop in Grenada in early April.

Photo by Cecil Shillingford, USAID/OFDA

New RDAP Contract Announced

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"USAID/OFDA is extremely pleased to continue our relationship with IRG as we move forward with our DRR strategy, especially given the positive impacts the consultants have had in technical assistance and response in the region," said Tim Callaghan, USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor for the LAC region.

While the IRG contract award allows for continuity of the RDAP training and technical assistance program, the new contract contains some changes. Joining the RDAP technical manager Fabián Arellano in the San Jose office is DRR specialist Eduardo Gutiérrez, whose expertise will be particularly helpful in advancing the regional office's strategic initiative in DRR, according to IRG. Experienced disaster manager Michael Curry has replaced Stephen Smith as the new IRG chief of party in San Jose. Additionally, IRG has partnered with Virginia-based Development & Training Services, Inc. (dTS) to provide strategic support to the team in the areas of communication and information, conferences, and training assessment and evaluation. Continuing in her role as the LAC information specialist, Auriana Koutnik is now the dTS representative on the team.

The LAC regional consultant network, composed of 21 disaster management specialists located throughout the region, will continue to implement the RDAP work plan. These specialists carry out training and technical assistance activities and are available for immediate deployment to help coordinate disaster response activities, if required.

To plan this year's program activities as well as review and discuss the new regional strategy for the 2009-2013 period, LAC regional advisors, disaster risk management specialists, and other USAID/OFDA staff are scheduled to participate in a strategic planning meeting in Costa Rica during the week of August 3.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



UDELAS Director Berta Torrijos De Arosemena (right) and USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan sign the agreement.

Photo courtesy of Lizbeth Ríos, UDELAS

MOU Signed with Panama University

USAID/OFDA and the Universidad Especializada de las Américas (UDELAS) in Panama have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) calling for mutual assistance in the development of programs and activities related to disaster risk reduction (DRR) education and technical assistance for the community.

USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan and UDELAS Director Berta Torrijos de Arosemena signed the agreement on May 29 during a ceremony attended by the Pan American Health Organization, Panama Red Cross, Panama Firefighters Corps, and other national organizations involved in disaster response and risk reduction efforts.

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