

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA



USAID/OFDA staff survey earthquake damage in Portoviejo, Ecuador. Photo by Fabián Arellano, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Provides Humanitarian Assistance to Earthquake-Affected Populations in Ecuador

In response to the magnitude 7.8 earthquake that struck off the northwestern coast of Ecuador on April 16, USAID/OFDA activated a disaster response team to help assess the situation and meet some of the primary humanitarian needs identified by the Government of Ecuador (GoE) following the disaster. The team, composed of 15 international disaster experts and seven local consultants, traveled to the capital city of Quito, Guayaquil city, and affected towns along the Pacific coast to assess damage, identify priority humanitarian needs, and provide analyses of the situation on the ground.

The earthquake resulted in at least 660 deaths, displaced more than 30,000 people, and caused significant damage to infrastructure, with more than 9,700 buildings reported damaged or destroyed, according to the GoE. In the days following the earthquake, urban search-and-rescue (USAR) teams from 11 countries, many of which had received USAID/OFDA training in previous years, deployed to Ecuador to work alongside national USAR teams to rescue 113 people from collapsed structures.

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor John Kimbrough commented, “It was rewarding to be approached by dozens of USAR team members from El Salvador, Colombia, and other countries who expressed their gratitude for the training they had received through USAID/OFDA. Baltazar Solano, who leads the Salvadoran USAR team, estimated that 80 percent of his team had received USAID/OFDA training.”

To help coordinate the life-saving work of the national and international USAR teams, USAID/OFDA deployed a three-person Americas Support Team (AST) to assist the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) On-Site Operations Coordination Center operations in Manabí Province’s Manta city, Pedernales town, and Portoviejo city. The AST brought tents and communications equipment valued at more than \$185,000 to assist UNDAC with its coordination with the GoE. When the mission ended on May 13, the AST donated the equipment to the Ecuadorian Red Cross and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

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USAID/OFDA Donates Equipment To Combat Forest Fires in Panama

In early April, several forest fires broke out in Darién National Park, Panama, one of the largest protected areas in Central America and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The damage was so extensive that the affected areas equal approximately the sum of all areas damaged by forest fires in the previous five years, according to Government of Panama (GoP) Environment Minister Mirei Endara.

On April 25, in response to a request from the GoP for technical assistance to combat the fires, USAID/OFDA deployed Maria Luisa Alfaro, a forest fire management specialist from the Regional Disaster Assistance Program, to assess the situation. Based on Alfaro’s evaluation of needs, USAID/OFDA donated 81 backpack fire pumps, valued at \$15,000, to Panama to help firefighters boost their manual fire suppression capabilities.

During the donation ceremony, Minister Endara noted that the firefighting equipment will help extinguish fires more efficiently in Panama’s protected wilderness areas. According to USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Manuel Santana, “This cooperation is part of USAID/OFDA’s disaster risk reduction program, which since 1992 has helped GoP entities strengthen their prevention and preparedness capabilities.”

DRMS Santana noted that, at the request of the GoP, the U.S. Government (USG) also helped respond to the fire emergency by providing three military helicopters, helicopter buckets, and personnel who worked for several days to fight the fires.



USAID/OFDA DRMS Manuel Santana and Panamanian environmental authorities gathered during the donation ceremony. Courtesy of MiAmbiente



USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan helps the Ecuadorian Red Cross distribute relief supplies to families affected by the earthquake. Photo by Michael Camchong, USAID/OFDA

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On April 24, USAID/OFDA airlifted relief supplies, including 1,000 rolls of heavy-duty plastic sheeting for construction of transitional shelters, 20,400 water containers, 3,480 kitchen sets, and five large portable water storage and distribution units, to help an estimated 50,000 earthquake-affected individuals.

Additionally, USAID/OFDA deployed four structural engineers to assist the GoE in conducting habitability assessments of earthquake-affected buildings and other infrastructure. The USAID/OFDA-sponsored engineers, who arrived in Guayaquil on April 22, included two members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, one member of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, and a structural engineer from Bogotá, Colombia. The engineers evaluated more than 100 structures, providing GoE officials with data on the structural integrity of homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure, including the Poza Honda Dam in Manabí.

USAID/OFDA also deployed a water, sanitation, and hygiene specialist and a shelter specialist to affected areas to speak with GoE officials, community leaders, and families to identify the most pressing needs in those two sectors. Their assessments are being used in programs supported by USAID/OFDA and humanitarian partners to provide affected communities with safe drinking water, sanitation solutions, personal hygiene kits, transitional shelter materials, and other emergency supplies as appropriate.

USAID Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) contributed \$500,000 to the UN World Food Program's emergency operation to provide locally procured food assistance to affected families in the hardest-hit areas.

In response to earthquake damage at the Eloy Alfaro International Airport in Manta, the U.S. Department of Defense deployed a mobile air traffic control tower and technical team to support Ecuadorian air traffic control operations and augment the capacity of humanitarian actors to deliver relief items to affected areas.

As of May 18, the USG had provided nearly \$3 million in humanitarian assistance to help earthquake-affected people in Ecuador.

USAID/OFDA Salutes Retiring Costa Rican Red Cross Director Colonel Guillermo Arroyo

USAID/OFDA would like to salute Colonel Guillermo Arroyo, former National Director of Disaster Relief and Operations for the Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC), who retired on May 15 after 55 years of service.

For more than five decades, Colonel Arroyo successfully guided hundreds of high-profile emergency responses across Costa Rica and around the region, including the Limón earthquake in 1991, the Cinchona earthquake in 2009, and the eruptions of Arenal and Irazú volcanoes in the 1960s, as well as myriad floods, landslides, fires, and other disasters over the years.

According to the CRRC, Colonel Arroyo's passion for the Red Cross started when he was a child. Since his beginnings as a Red Cross volunteer, he has always shown commitment to the institution's ideals and principles. Colonel Arroyo was one of the organization's first trainers and has coached thousands of responders through the years. He has also served as an expert advisor for other first response institutions, which frequently request his cooperation to coordinate regional responses to complex crises. Colonel Arroyo's great knowledge, leadership, and transformation initiatives have helped Central American response organizations become more effective in achieving their life-saving missions and better prepared to face current and future challenges.

"Colonel Arroyo's trustworthiness, leadership, and technical expertise have greatly influenced the successful emergency preparedness and response model used by the Red Cross today in Central America. We are grateful to have had the honor of working with him and wish him all the best in his future projects," said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

CRRC President Glauco Quesada said, "Colonel Arroyo always stood out for his ability to face operational challenges with great passion and devotion to the Red Cross movement... We respect and admire him for his dedication to promoting common good and cooperation."

According to Quesada, Colonel Arroyo is skilled in taking complex emergency response and risk management responsibilities and transforming them into practical actions to achieve his goals.

Colonel Arroyo's 55 years of dedicated service represent a great legacy of service and compassion, one that is proof of how one individual can positively change the lives of thousands.



Colonel Guillermo Arroyo, former CRRC National Director of Relief and Operations, enjoys his retirement ceremony. Courtesy of CRRC

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