

- ① ROC President Chen Shui-bian greets Diplomatic Alternative Service program trainees
- ② ICDF overseas volunteers
- ③ Children gather near home rebuilding in Europe



International Humanitarian Assistance

The Pressing Needs of International Humanitarian Assistance

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCRC), global climate change, changing socioeconomic patterns, and sprawling human development have led to a growing threat of natural disasters. Globally during the 1990s, natural disasters killed an average of almost 1,300 people every week. Ninety-eight percent of the victims of these disasters lived in countries with low or medium human development. These figures are frightening in their own right, but the IFRCRC also points out that although the actual number of disasters is relatively stable, the total number of people impacted by disasters, and associated costs, have risen dramatically. In 2000, 256 million people were affected by disasters, up from an average of 211 million per year during the 1990s. Since the 1950s, costs associated with natural disasters have increased 14-fold. It is unnecessary to state that natural disasters are a threat to human society, and that everything that can be done, must be done, to prevent and mitigate their damage.

Some research indicates that global climate change and associated environmental problems such as deforestation and desertification are root causes of an increase in the magnitude of certain types of natural disasters. A major problem, the IFRCRC says, is the increase in hydro-meteorological disasters such as floods, windstorms and droughts, which may be linked to climate

change. Also important, however, are the effects of human demographic patterns on the human toll of disasters in the world. Increases in poverty and resultant poor living conditions, and construction of cities and communities in dangerous areas (some 40 of 50 of the world's fastest-growing cities are located in earthquake zones, according to the IFRCRC, and towns and villages in flood-prone areas have long been a human development problem) have exacerbated the effects of world disasters.

Apart from natural disasters, human conflict has also disrupted societies and created refugees, many who find themselves living in squalid, dangerous conditions far from their homes. Children are especially at risk during refugee crises. The statistics are terrifying, but the UN estimates that over the last decade, two million children have been killed in conflict, over one million have lost their parents, and well over half of the world's displaced people are children.

To heal the human misery and repair the material destruction caused by man-made and natural disasters, international and regional aid and development groups, NGOs, national governments and local communities are working harder to increase humanitarian assistance and coordinate their activities. The ICDF is itself deeply involved in this work, and emergency assistance (in concert with the groups noted above) to allies or countries friendly to the ROC always takes priority in ICDF work. The organization's very Statute states that it shall provide "humanitarian aid to international refugees or



- ① Hurricane Mitch reconstruction project
- ② A girl expresses gratitude for the Mongolia Blizzard Relief project
- ③ ICDF medical service mission

countries suffering from natural disasters” (Chapter 1, Article 7). In this report we shall examine the ICDF's cooperative humanitarian assistance projects, with their overall aims of not only providing emergency assistance to countries and peoples distressed by disasters, but also of implementing long-term reconstruction and development projects that include sound disaster prevention measures within overall community development. This work is helping people put their lives back in order and become more self-reliant, and is creating the conditions for safer lives in the future.

Origin and Development of ROC Humanitarian Assistance

The ROC government began participating in international relief and humanitarian assistance undertakings during its rapid economic expansion in the 1980s. The International Disaster Relief Aid Fund was established in 1990 to strengthen overseas disaster relief and humanitarian aid operations, and the ROC government began including funding for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance in its regular budgets. The ROC has also worked to create a sound legal basis for the nation's humanitarian assistance efforts, including the creation of the International Cooperation Development Act, which is being reviewed by the national legislature, and which incorporates humanitarian relief among the country's foreign aid goals. Taiwanese private charitable groups including the Tzu

Chi Association, Fokuangshan Association, Rotary Club, Lion's Club, World Vision Taiwan, Children's Welfare League Foundation of Taiwan, and Taiwan Root have also provided resources for overseas humanitarian assistance work.

The people of the ROC have joined their government, the nation's charities and NGOs in contributing money and human resources during disasters worldwide in recent years. The ROC has not forgotten the outpouring of international support that followed the “921” earthquake in September 1999. Since that time, the ROC government has helped other nations stricken by earthquakes, including El Salvador and India in 2001.

With its many disaster relief policies and programs, the ROC government, working in conjunction with the nation's populace and private sector, has initiated a policy of “humanitarian diplomacy.” President Chen Shui-bian has emphasized that the ROC must increase its participation in international NGOs with humanitarian aims. Because this policy offers a productive and benevolent means by which the ROC can contribute to the international community, the country will continue to pursue it vigorously.

ICDF Humanitarian Assistance

The ICDF has included humanitarian assistance funding in its annual budget since the start of fiscal year 2001, and is currently planning and executing programs to respond to overseas natural disasters and refugee crises. This work includes emergency relief



in the aftermath of disasters, post-disaster resettlement assistance, and long-term reconstruction programs. Goals of these programs include not only restoring social conditions to normal, but also development of safer environments than existed before disasters. This last point is most important to consider. The IFRCRC's World Disasters Report 2001 says that, "in the past, post-disaster reconstruction has focused too much on rebuilding physical infrastructure. But there is more to recovery than concrete." Nobody understands this better than citizens who have lived through disasters and are then attempting to rebuild their lives and plan for better, safer futures. Several recent ICDF projects illustrate how ICDF disaster relief work conforms to this view.

Hurricane Mitch struck Central America ferociously in October 1998, and the ROC's response to the unfolding disaster was swift. The nation had a delegation in Central America within days, and by early November 1998 the ICDF had set up a mission to appraise the damage. The ICDF went to work with the OAS, emergency lending was arranged, and work immediately began on reconstruction of destroyed communities in northern and central Nicaragua. Community Housing Commissions were created and citizen work teams began construction projects. Physical infrastructure work included safer housing, better designed communities with housing relocated away from riverbanks, and improved water, health care and other public facilities. The end result, when



the first 838 houses constructed in the program were completed in August 2000, was much more than the reconstruction of houses lost to Hurricane Mitch. It was, said Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman, a "transformation of Nicaraguan rural life."

This year, the ICDF conducted the El Salvador Earthquake Reconstruction Project in January, and the Peru Earthquake Reconstruction Project in June. These projects helped El Salvador and Peru implement second-stage reconstruction projects. The El Salvador project helped residents build bamboo houses, while in Peru, earthquake-resistant adobe brick houses were built. In what is becoming the ICDF's standard approach to post-disaster reconstruction, these projects mobilized the combined skills of ICDF technical missions, international organizations, NGOs, national governments, and of course, local communities. Local institutions were strengthened during rebuilding, citizens attained valuable work skills, and new community leadership emerged—all keys to sustainable recovery.

In another important emergency relief project in 2001, the ICDF conducted the Mongolia Blizzard Relief Project in January, to assist residents who had suffered livestock and financial losses after severe blizzards pounded the country. This project, which included the donation of emergency relief payments, gave stricken families the necessities of life as soon as possible after the emergency, and helped them during the difficult post-disaster period.



In the area of improved village-level medical services, equipment and facilities, the ICDF has established medical service missions in a number of nations in Africa. Apart from providing routine inpatient, outpatient and surgical services at existing hospitals and clinics, medical mission personnel also provide services in remote areas. Additionally, the ICDF is striving to improve standards of grassroots-level medical care in the Eastern Caribbean region by providing funding in its annual budget for the Eastern Caribbean Medical Equipment Donation Program. This program is strengthening medical equipment and facilities in four nations of the region, improving the quality of community medical services, and helping these island nations deliver medical services to isolated areas. These programs, while not in response to immediate disasters, could well prevent potential health emergencies, and are also establishing better medical infrastructure and services that could be used in the event of future natural disasters.

The Future of ICDF Humanitarian Assistance Operations

As a conscientious member of international society, the ROC considers it its duties to contribute to world welfare and fulfill its international responsibilities. Moreover, the ROC government remains grateful to the world for aid it has received during past disasters. Consequently, in the future the ICDF, in accordance with its statutory obligations, will strengthen its international humani-

itarian assistance operations by developing in the following directions:

Expanding the Scope of International Humanitarian Assistance Operations

The ICDF's current international humanitarian assistance operations consist primarily of natural disaster relief, resettlement assistance, post-disaster reconstruction work, and grassroots-level medical services. In the future, the scope of ICDF humanitarian assistance efforts will be expanded to include assistance for international refugees and displaced persons, with the goals of resettlement and return to normal lives and, when possible, the provision of long-term socioeconomic development packages. In light of the correlation of humanitarian aid and basic human rights, and to deepen the content of its humanitarian assistance operations, the ICDF is also considering incorporating human rights preconditions within its humanitarian assistance work, such as basic education, health, nutrition, sanitation, poverty relief, and care and protection of children.

Increasing the Range of Humanitarian Aid Recipients

The ICDF currently provides the bulk of its humanitarian assistance operations to nations formally allied with the ROC. Believing that humanitarian assistance is a universal value, however, the ICDF will endeavor in the future to provide humanitarian assistance not only to allied nations, but



also to other friendly developing nations and their citizens in true need of assistance.

Strengthening Cooperation with NGOs

Many Taiwanese social welfare organizations and humanitarian aid groups have made noteworthy contributions to international humanitarian aid work. In light of their experience, and shared cultural bonds with the ICDF, the ICDF will extend cooperation with these NGOs in the future. On the larger stage, the ICDF will also strengthen ties with international NGOs (such as World Vision Taiwan and the International Red Cross), which have extensive knowledge and practical experience in humanitarian aid work. The ICDF believes that partnerships with NGOs large and small will make its own humanitarian assistance operations even more international and professional.

Balancing Emergency Relief and Long-term Development

In the most limited sense, humanitarian assistance consists solely of rapid emergency relief in the wake of crisis. But many of the most difficult challenges—reconstruction of homes and public facilities, reformation of people’s livelihoods, and the sparks of community rebirth and “hope building”—occur after immediate relief efforts have been concluded. Long-term assistance is therefore of the utmost importance. Particularly in the case of developing countries, assistance for social, educational and economic development in stricken areas deeply affects future

prospects. The ICDF consequently will balance and harmonize its emphasis on emergency relief and long-term development projects. Following emergency relief and resettlement assistance during the early stages of a crisis, the ICDF will assess the situation and then plan medium and long-term socioeconomic, educational and infrastructure development programs, bringing to bear the combined efforts of its technical assistance, lending and education and training resources.