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U.S. Gave \$7 Million To Help Latin America Prepare for Disasters

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance aims to reduce impact of disasters

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Washington –The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said September 30 it had provided more than \$7 million for ongoing disaster preparedness and mitigation programs to Latin America in fiscal year 2006. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are highly vulnerable to natural disasters including earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis and volcanoes.

In 2006, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) supported the development of disaster risk management practices in Latin America and the Caribbean through a number of programs, including \$4.7 million in funding for the regional disaster assistance program (RDAP).

Under the RDAP, USAID maintains a network of disaster assistance experts located throughout the region who are able to deploy to disaster sites, assess damages and provide guidance on disaster preparedness and mitigation activities. The program also provides technical assistance, including guidance for strategic planning, training and organizational development, and help in preparing local, departmental and national emergency action plans.

Since the establishment of the RDAP in 1989, USAID/OFDA has trained nearly 43,000 individuals in 26 countries, many of whom have assumed leadership roles in national organizations that manage natural-disasters preparedness, response and mitigation.

USAID/OFDA also supported the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) efforts to promote improved disaster preparedness and response in the health sector. As part of a five-year collaboration focused on increasing the capacity of health professionals to respond to disasters in the Latin America and the Caribbean, USAID/OFDA provided \$1 million dollars to PAHO in fiscal year 2006, bringing total USAID/OFDA support for PAHO since

1989 to over \$9 million.

Other USAID/OFDA supported programs in 2006 included the Pan American Development Foundation's (PADF) efforts to involve the private sector in disaster assistance. With \$440,000 in USAID support, the PADF helped businesses develop strategies to mobilize quickly private-sector resources for disaster assistance and created awareness among businesses regarding disaster preparedness and mitigation.

Another USAID-supported program in Latin America and the Caribbean provided volcano-monitoring equipment and assistance in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama and Colombia. This assistance helped successfully forecast eruptions in Ecuador and Colombia, permitting the timely evacuation of residents.

USAID/OFDA also provided nearly \$250,000 to facilitate the development of a Caribbean tsunami early warning system that, through new software and equipment, will more rapidly transmit information on these events to vulnerable communities in the Eastern Caribbean.

Through these and other programs, USAID/OFDA provided a total of \$7,156,819 in fiscal year 2006. These funds already have reduced the region's vulnerability to disasters and enhanced governments' abilities to respond to disasters, Tim Callaghan, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance's senior regional adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean, told the *Washington File* October 4.

"Our work in the region has helped to reduce the effects of hurricanes while increasing the ability of affected countries to respond," he said. "Through focused efforts on preparedness and mitigation, we are already seeing progress in the ability of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to take the lead on disaster response, and we expect this progress to continue."

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