

Getting Prepared for Disasters



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Nicaragua and the rest of Central American countries this week culminated a course of disaster management which will leave the region better prepared before a disaster natural or caused by humans.

Central America is one of the zones most endangered and vulnerable on the American continent due to its geographical position and poverty, so any cyclone, tsunami, earthquake, flood or epidemic could cause a tragedy.

To be better preparation and reaction to these events, a group of specialists of different nationalities from Fordham University, New York, traveled to Managua with the aim of preparing specialists in Central America, Belize, Panama, the Bahamas, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic in handling disasters.

Colonel Mario Perezcassar, head of the Civil Defense Army of Nicaragua, said that preparation is a key element in risk management, as it goes hand in hand with reconstruction, in this case, the damage caused by hurricane Felix in September 2007.

Ten technicians for Nicaragua attended and 15 community leaders, who have the mission to multiply what they have learned in their institutions and localities.

Perezcassar recognized that for the Civil Defence it is difficult to fill the 153 municipalities in the country, with its 7000 locations, 15 departments and two special areas, mainly due to the lack of financial resources.

Juana Argeñal, owner of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Marena), stated that the methodology of the course, which lasted for the whole week, was interactive and dynamic, to facilitate replication of the event.

"The course will help to give answers more optimal in terms of prevention, management

and phenomena during the damage assessment, we know how to generate early warning and the unleashing of all contingency plans to protect lives," said Argeñal.

The immediate challenge is, according to the minister, to promote environmental education in all sectors, as this directly affects the outcome of a disaster, as in the case of a hurricane, whose strength is offset by forests.

For Perezcassar, preparation is so important that even Nicaragua should "rest", despite being one of the countries most advanced in the field of prevention.