



THE

# CEPAD REPORT

## NICARAGUA RESPONDS TO HAITI'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



*The ruins of a church left partially standing in Port-au-Prince. (Photo by Carlos Cardenas)*

For three weeks after the devastating earthquake in Port-au-Prince, the Managua desk of Carlos Cardenas remained empty, save for a copy of *El Nuevo Diario*, dated 13 January 2010, with the headline “**Catástrofe en Haití.**” The newspaper served as an expedient ‘out of office’ message to anyone who wanted to know where Carlos was. Within 24 hours of the paper’s printing he was on the ground in Haiti, joining forces with other coordinators of disaster relief.

Carlos Cardenas, a Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker based in Nicaragua, has worked as a representative for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) for the past eight years. He began with post-earthquake development projects in El Salvador and later represented PDA Latin America from

his home base at the CEPAD Central Office in Managua, Nicaragua.

After 21 days in Haiti, Carlos Cardenas returned to debrief with his partners at CEPAD and coordinate follow-up efforts. In Haiti he represented the PDA in a larger alliance of relief agencies called ACT, Action by Churches Together. ACT was instrumental in coordinating the efforts of many church-based organizations. “For us it was very difficult in Haiti to coordinate,” Carlos said, “because all of the 22 agencies had their own vision of what they wanted to do and how many families they could address, and so it’s not easy to engage in the same mission, same task, same activities.”

In the days immediately following the earthquake, unsettling seismic activity made rescue efforts

*CEPAD is a Christian institution working with poor communities in situations of risk, promoting justice, peace and solidarity, to improve quality of life.*

more dangerous. “The biggest aftershock was 6.1 on the Richter Scale,” stated Carlos. “Maybe in Nicaragua we are adapted to seismic activity because it’s common to feel shaking in Managua. But this was very scary because we had many people working in and around weak buildings.”

Even for someone with years of training and experience in emergency response, the work in Haiti was challenging. “It really was a hard experience to go down to the *barrios*, the small cities surrounding Port-Au-Prince, to see people trying to survive without any of these basic conditions, without food or water,” Carlos said. “It’s hard to listen to the pain that people are trying to express, to be under the influence of the pain of others. Sometimes when I got back to the compound I would think *we have everything and they have nothing*. I will need to talk and debrief these feelings. Two times I tried to stay at one of the shelters. I didn’t care about my safety as much as I cared about sharing what the people were feeling. The shelters were everywhere. Every square inch of every park was covered with a tent. The people I met at the shelters said that it was not possible for me to stay.”

The Nicaraguan response to the crisis in Haiti has been an extraordinary show of brother- and



Carlos Cardenas of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance with the flag given by his Haitian partners.

sisterhood to their Caribbean neighbors. The government of Nicaragua immediately sent a team of 31 military officers specializing in rescue and medicine. *La Prensa* on January 26 reported that of the 135 survivors pulled from under collapsed buildings, six were rescued and treated by the Nicaraguan Humanitarian Rescue Unit (URH). Also on January 26, Nicaragua sent an additional eight specialists to work in Port-au-Prince, including a surgeon, an orthopedist, an epidemiologist, a general practitioner, two nurses and two technicians.

Fundraising for Haiti has been carried out by several organizations, including the Nicaraguan Red Cross, the Mejia Godoy Foundation and *Radio CEPAD*. In the first week following the disaster, the Nicaraguan Red Cross collected over \$12,000. The loyal listeners of *Radio CEPAD*, most of extremely modest means, have given over \$2,500 to the earthquake victims, one small donation at a time. Listeners called the radio station to express solidarity and compassion for the Haitian people. They also shared memories of the 1972 earthquake that demolished Managua’s city center.

What does God ask of us in a situation as devastating as the Haiti earthquake? “I think that as people of God we are called not to assume that the crisis phase will end,” said Carlos Cardenas. “Haiti, before the earthquake, was already in crisis. So we have to accompany them, the local organizations and partners that we encounter, and find ways to recover. I’ve been in other emergency situations, and always we leave when we know the crisis has ended. But I think that in Haiti it’s not the case.”

The response brings to mind that CEPAD itself was founded just days after the Managua earthquake. Eight church denominations joined to coordinate their emergency relief efforts. The “D” in CEPAD at that time stood for *Damnificados*, or victims. Later as CEPAD’s mission expanded the “D” was changed to signify *Desarrollo*, or development. The church groups that joined forces to form CEPAD have not abandoned their mission to help the people of Nicaragua. With God’s grace similar alliances in Haiti will find continuity and commitment in their mission to accompany Haiti’s people in recovery.



## INTRODUCING THE NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

### *A Conversation with Pastor Roberto Baltodano*

In November the General Assembly elected CEPAD's Board of Directors for 2010-2012. The new Board took office on February 23 during a special service at the Nehemiah Center. Earlier in February CEPAD Report had an opportunity to sit down with Pastor Roberto Baltodano, the incoming Board President, to discuss his perspective and priorities for the coming term.

**CEPAD Report:** *Thank you for taking the time to talk with us Pastor Roberto, and congratulations on your new term as president. How long have you been working with CEPAD?*

**Pastor Roberto:** Approximately ten years. I was a member of the outgoing Board as a fiscal or supervising member. The fiscal's role is to oversee everything that the Board does and to make sure that they are following the statutes and the bylaws of the organization. So that gave me an opportunity to know the operations of the Board.

**CR:** *Please tell us a little about your family and home church.*

**PR:** My family lives in San Raphael del Sur [40 kms. southwest of Managua]. There are three children in my family: Alonzo is 30 years old, Alberto is 25, and Laura is 18. Alonzo and Alberto have finished their university studies, and Laura is in her second year at university. For 15 years I was the pastor of a church in San Raphael del Sur, and now I'm working in a mission field here in Managua, in a neighborhood called La Renada. And so that's where I'm working now as a pastor. I am part of the Nicaraguan American Baptist Association, which has been here in Nicaragua since 1950.

**CR:** *In your time with CEPAD, what do you think has been the organization's greatest accomplishment?*

**PR:** CEPAD is able to accompany the people out in the communities and to help them improve their lives. So that's the biggest achievement CEPAD has had, to promote development in the communities.

**CR:** *Of CEPAD's programs, is there one that is closest to your heart?*

**PR:** Yes, the training that CEPAD gives to pastors and leaders. This is very important to my heart that we continue struggling and supporting this. Because the training, education and formation of those we call servants of God will improve God's work in Nicaragua, and then the people will live better.

**CR:** *The CEPAD Report is printed in English for North American partners and delegations. What would you like them to know about CEPAD?*

**PR:** The first thing they should know is that CEPAD has a very strong interest in improving the quality of service and transparency. And they should know that we have a desire to work with people in a lot of other areas but the resources are limited, and so I think they should know that there are a lot more needs of people in Nicaragua than we are able to attend to. Also I want to say thank you to all of you for your support of CEPAD. It's a pleasure to speak to our North American partners, and my wish is that the Lord will bless you greatly.



*From Left to Right: Isidro Mendoza, Freddy Solórzano, Marcos Antonio Gomez, Sandra Velasquez, Lilliam Reyna, and Roberto Baltodano.*

## **IN ADDITION TO PRESIDENT ROBERTO BALTODANO, THE BOARD FOR 2010-2012 CONSISTS OF:**

Vice-President Lilliam Reyna served as President of the CEPAD for the past two terms. Before she served in the General Assembly's human Rights and Legal Affairs commission as well as the Church Relations commission. Mrs. Reyna, a retired pastor of the Church of the Nazarene, represents the CEPAD Pastoral Committee in Carazo.

Secretary Sandra Velasquez is a lay pastor for the Pentecostal "Bride of the Lamb" Church. This is Mrs. Velasquez' fourth term on the Board where she has served a Member-At-Large, Vice-President and now as Secretary. She also served on the Human Rights and Legal Affairs Commission for two periods.

Treasurer Freddy Solórzano is a pastor of the National Apostolic Assembly in Managua. He is an accountant by profession and has served on the General Assembly of CEPAD as a member of the Radio Commission. He served as the second member-at-large at the past Board.

First Member-at-Large Isidro Mendoza is a pastor of the Church of God in Nicaragua. During the 1990's he worked with the CEPAD Pastoral Committee of Leon and Chinandega at the west part of the country.

Second Member-at-Large Marcos Antonio Gomez is a pastor of the National Church of the Nazarene in Teustepe, 70 kilometers east of Managua.

As founder of CEPAD, Dr. Gustavo Parajón holds a seat in the General Assembly and serves as President Emeritus on the Board of Directors where he acts as an advisor to the Board. Dr. Parajón, a retired Nicaraguan missionary of the American Baptist Churches of the USA, is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Managua.

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# FREE TRADE VS. FAIR TRADE IN NICARAGUA

For over 37 years CEPAD has answered God's call to 'stand with and serve poor communities' and promote just relationships that benefit Nicaraguans. In light of the troubled economic times in our global economy, the question is how have Nicaragua's poor communities been affected by the international financial crisis? In most ways Nicaragua operates 'under the radar,' below the ups and downs of Wall Street. Downturns have only a small effect, just as upturns do little to help. Nicaragua is much more susceptible to the decisions made by first-world countries regarding trade, aid and debt eradication. These political maneuverings often have significant impact on Nicaragua's rural population.

Nicaragua has the distinction of being the only country signatory to both the 'free trade' CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) and the 'fair trade' ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas). CAFTA is a notoriously one-sided agreement aimed at eliminating tariffs and opening up, in the U.S. government's own words, "new market access for U.S. consumer and industrial products and agricultural products." [www.export.gov/FTA/cafta-dr] The agreement also "liberalizes the services sectors, protects U.S. investments in the region, and strengthens protections for U.S. patents, trademarks, and trade sectors." In exchange the partner countries get reduced tariffs for their exports to the United States. The benefits for U.S. based corporations are deep and wide; the benefits for Nicaraguan agricultural producers are the opportunities to compete with other poor countries for an export deal based on lowest price.

**ALBA agreements have ambitious plans to end illiteracy, support free health care, set up emergency funds, eliminate debt, and promote solidarity through joint-venture investments.**

The problems with making trade agreements with global powerhouses like the U.S. and Europe has been obvious to third-world countries for at least a century. Recently the Latin American countries have sought ways to answer the imbalances. One such attempt is the international cooperation organization called ALBA. President Hugo Chavez, an outspoken U.S. opponent, first proposed the idea in December 2001, and signed the first agreement with Cuba in Havana on December 14, 2004. The conceptual framework of the agreement was a deliberate repudiation against the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), of which every country in the Americas except Cuba is considered a member by default—a kind of trade version of the Monroe Doctrine. The ALBA countries have agreements that emphasize social welfare, bartering and mutual economic aid. ALBA agreements have ambitious plans to end illiteracy, support free health care, set up emergency funds, eliminate debt, and promote solidarity through joint-venture investments. One of ALBA goals of integration is to put in place the *sucre*, an alternative currency to be shared by Latin American nations.

The economic muscle for Chavez in these agreements has been his country's oil wealth. With Cuba he bartered petroleum for medical assistance in the countryside of Venezuela. In 2006 Chavez bartered oil for natural gas with Bolivia, which became the third country to form ALBA agreements. Honduran President Manuel Zelaya signed an agreement in 2008, but Honduras officially withdrew from ALBA under the post-coup government in late 2009.

Ecuador became a member in 2009, along with several small Caribbean nations.

In January 2007, Daniel Ortega's first official act as president was to join ALBA. Venezuela immediately acted to forgive Nicaragua's US \$31.8 million debt. Ortega and Chavez signed agreements regarding energy, health care, agricultural credits and additional aid to Nicaragua. The joint-venture company Alba Petróleos de Nicaragua (ALBANIC) was formed to import Venezuelan oil at concessionary rates and invest a portion in infrastructure, particularly into small energy plants in rural areas of Nicaragua.

There is no question that the ALBA initiatives have benefited poor communities in Nicaragua and throughout the ALBA nations. Aid from Venezuela has come at a time when U.S. and European entities have been withdrawing aid, citing problems with the local elections of 2008 as a major concern. ALBA funds have lessened the negative impact of denied first-world funding. Unfortunately, the ALBA agreements are accompanied by two additional burdens. First, the anti-imperialist rhetoric of leaders like Chavez is deafening many moderate ears to the benefits of regional integration and cooperation

in Latin America. It solidifies and justifies the position of U.S. and European authorities in their withdrawal of support for the region. Second, ALBA initiatives are quickly becoming mired in mismanagement and corruption charges. Nicaragua's Comptrollers' Office decided this month to audit the company ALBA of Nicaragua, S.A. (ALBANISA) following news that the joint-venture had purchased Channel 8 Television, and that Rafael Paniagua, the Venezuelan manager of ALBANISA, had stated that Hugo Chavez had "a nation-building project in Nicaragua."

It's safe to say that free trade isn't always fair. (Take, for example, the coffee market in the early 1990's, when fluctuations in commodities pricing forced growers in Latin America to sell below cost.) The problem in our interdependent, global economy is how to assure that "fair trade" is fair, since a multitude of subjective strategies are being tried by governments and non-profit companies. While we sort this out, the rural Nicaraguan and many other struggling people are subject to the gamesmanship of politicians and the greed of corporations. If fair trade initiatives are to evolve and grow, they will need to continuously reevaluate their effectiveness in promoting justice in commerce.



ALBA in Spanish means 'sunrise'. Daniel Ortega's ALBA message is everywhere in Managua. (Photo by Carl Agsten)



Left: Kai, Carl, Leslie, Ella, and Ben (Photo by Donna Edmundson); Right: Lily and Martin

## NEW MISSION PARTNERS

**Carl Agsten and Leslie Clay** are Presbyterian Mission Co-Workers assigned to partnership with CEPAD. Leslie and Carl moved to Nicaragua in late September, shortly after Leslie's ordination to the position by the West Virginia Presbytery.

Leslie will be working with CEPAD's Partnership program, facilitating communication between Nicaraguan communities and their partners in North America. Leslie has a Masters of Divinity from San Francisco Theological Seminary, and in 2005 received a Doctor of Divinity from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio with an emphasis on Clergy's Response to Domestic Violence. She has served churches in Barrow, Alaska, Evanston, Illinois and Charleston, West Virginia.

Carl is writer and editor of the CEPAD Report, and will be working on other communication and development projects. Carl recently worked at ZMM, Inc. Architects and Engineers as a manager and technical writer. In 2009 they began a three-year contract with Presbyterian Church (USA) to work in Nicaragua. Carl and Leslie have two

daughters: Kai, age 3 and Ella, age 2. Their son Ben, age 19, is a sophomore at Oberlin College in Ohio.

**Lily and Martin Emo** are all the way from New Zealand and are NZCMS (New Zealand Church Missionary Society) mission partners from the New Zealand Anglican Church. They have been in Nicaragua for a year now, which consisted of adjusting to a new culture and climate, learning Spanish for the first time, and working for CEPAD.

Martin is a high-school teacher with qualifications in music, history, theology and English. He works one-to-one alongside English teachers to improve the quality of English taught in different schools that are associated with CEPAD. Lily works alongside Carl Agsten in the communications department of CEPAD, taking photos, designing layouts, and generally making sure that things look good. She has a design degree with an emphasis on photography, and has also completed post-graduate studies in development studies and theology.

We want to hear from you! Please let us know what you think about the content of this edition, and tell us what you would like to see in future CEPAD Reports. Address correspondence to:

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# THE CEPAD REPORT

## WE'RE BACK!

Please pardon our absence in 2009. We're back, publishing the *CEPAD Report* four times a year to share information about CEPAD's ministry and the Nicaraguan context.

After printing and distribution costs, all income generated by the *CEPAD Report* supports CEPAD's programs.

See page 7 for contact information.

Suggested Subscription: \$15

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