

Statement of Ambassador Luigi R. Einaudi  
U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS  
NICARAGUAN DISASTER  
Special OAS Permanent Council  
September 4, 1992

Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of my government, and of the people of the United States, I express heartfelt condolences to the people of Nicaragua for the loss of lives and property they have suffered during these last terrible days.

I join my distinguished colleagues in this council in giving my assurances to Ambassador Tijerino that the United States is making and will continue to make a maximum effort to provide relief to the victims of the tidal waves and floods in Nicaragua.

In response to the destruction along the Pacific coast, the United States is making available, as quickly as possible, dols 5 million for Nicaragua's Social Investment Fund. These funds are new money and will be available to the Government of Nicaragua to support repair and reconstruction of infrastructure and to generate employment in areas affected by the tidal waves.

The first planeload of U.S. disaster relief supplies -- a U.S. Air Force C-130 cargo plane -- arrived in Managua yesterday morning. It contained supplies for shelter for the victims, water containers, food and other forms of immediate relief.

A United States Military Needs Assessment Team also arrived on that flight. That team is working with the United States Agency for International Development and Nicaraguan government relief officials to survey damage and to determine reconstruction priorities. They will remain in Nicaragua for several days.

A disaster relief specialist from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of A.I.D., Paul Bell, arrived in Managua eighteen hours after the disaster occurred. Mr. Bell has already completed an initial damage assessment in cooperation with Nicaraguan government officials and other international relief organizations.

Mr. Bell and U.S. embassy officials met yesterday with President Chamorro, then visited the affected area with Nicaraguan cabinet officials to determine further immediate needs. Mr. Bell and three U.S. military officers from the U.S. Southern Command in Panama are conducting a border-to-border aerial survey of the Nicaraguan coastline today. We expect that it will be on the basis of their assessments that we determine how U.S. monies made available for infrastructure repair will be allocated.

Mr. Chairman, permit me one final observation. I wish to congratulate you and the others responsible for inviting the Pan American Development Foundation and the Inter American Development Bank to send representatives to this meeting. Their role underscores the potential of this Organization to expand its role not only in areas independent of the forces of nature -- in the case of Nicaragua we are seeing enormous contributions being made by the OAS's International Commission for Support and Verification (CIAV) -- but also in areas such as in this case, as in Florida and in the Bahamas, where our people really become prey to the forces of nature and their consequences.

Greater coordination is possible on disaster assistance within the inter-American system. We have heard mention of the Pan American Health Organization, as well as the IDB and the Pan American Development Foundation. I would note that in the last two years OAS entities have produced important studies on disaster relief. One study is entitled "Disasters, Planning and Development: Managing Natural Hazards to Reduce Loss." This is an OAS publication produced by the Department of Regional Affairs and the Environment of the Executive Secretariat for Economic and Social Affairs, of the OAS. Interestingly enough, in collaboration with the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of A.I.D. And here I have a study on Disaster Relief Operations, which was produced less than a year ago by the Inter American Defense Board.

We should make a special effort to increase coordination of these various initiatives, perhaps using the Pan American Development Foundation which I understand we have explicitly charged with that responsibility. I would note that unfortunately, this is not a purely occasional or haphazard situation. This decade of the 1990's has been named the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It has been named that not because we think we can control natural disasters but because there is good scientific evidence -- I

don't know how many of you would have seen the summary of it in the New York Times recently -- that suggests after twenty relatively calm years in terms of hurricanes like Andrew, we may now -- in part because of ecological changes in Africa -- be witnessing a dramatic increase in activities precisely in our hemisphere.

Finally, I would also note there are potential benefits to be derived under the Inter-American Convention to Facilitate Disaster Assistance, adopted by the General Assembly in Santiago, and currently under active consideration by my government.

I will close by simply saying to the distinguished Ambassador from Nicaragua that, as stated in the preamble to that Convention, we will approach cooperation with his country in, and I quote from the Convention, "a genuine spirit of solidarity and good-neighborliness between the American states."

Thank you Mr. Chairman.