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Photo "Enfants Réfugiés du Monde"



Prologue



Relations between the European Union and Latin America, which from the beginning have been founded on a community of shared values and on the close historical and cultural links which unite both sides of the Atlantic, have taken a qualitative leap forward during the last few years in the framework of the strengthening of the comprehension of the mutual cultural and political identities.



The gradual rapprochement between the two regions has undoubtedly been given impetus by the democratic processes undertaken in the countries of Latin America and by the search for a definitive and enduring solution to the issues of pacification and respect for basic human rights.

In spite of the fact that in the great majority of Latin American countries a politically stable situation has been achieved, hundreds of thousands of people are still in need of well-defined and specific aid to enable them to overcome their problems of displacement.

It is now more than 10 years since the European Union put in place a specific financial instrument aimed at with a view to closely monitoring and focusing on the process of reintegration into society of all these peoples. Our assistance goes further than mere economic support, directly involving all the elements of society in the search for solutions through a participatory approach.

The European Union, through a commitment directed at the most disadvantaged peoples, has made available to the Latin American region a number of initiatives intended to offer an opportunity to those groups which, by achieving economic and social self-sufficiency, could become the protagonists of an integrated society and masters of their own future.

Manuel Marín
Vice-President of the European Commission



People rediscovering their roots

2 Central America: a model for peace-making

The level of violence and tension has fallen significantly in Latin America in recent years. 15 years ago, a climate associated with guerrilla activities prevailed in most Central American countries: acts of violent repression, deportations, disappearances, torture and human rights violations were common. Thousands of men and women lost their lives and two million civilians were uprooted.



However, at the close of the 1980s, and as a result of the initiative taken by the Contadora Group, the various parties involved in the conflicts showed an increasing willingness to negotiate. The Group aims at promoting a regional solution to put an end to the political instability and the economic stagnation into which the entire region was sinking. A process of democratisation gradually got under way (peace agreements were signed, elections were held) and with a view to promoting this process, the European Union embarked upon a comprehensive political dialogue with the region. The dialogue was called the San José Dialogue (Costa Rica) after the location of the first Ministerial-level meeting in 1984. The region is now back on a fairly even keel and the stage has been set for a full-blown process of democratisation in Central American societies, which are now ruled by civilian governments.

The situation in Central America underwent such a radical change in the space of just a few years that it has become a kind of model from which the international community may draw inspiration for promoting peace, development and democracy in a region.

People rediscovering their roots



The European Union's political and financial support

The determination of the main leaders of the Central American States to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts was given tangible form in the "Esquipulas II" Agreement, which was signed in 1987 at the instigation of the Costa Rican President O. Arias, a Nobel Peace Prize winner. The European Union lent its full support to the Esquipulas process and decided to provide a substantial amount of financial aid to back its conviction that political stability is possible only when there is minimum level of socio-economic development on which to build. Hence the European Union's interest in the fate of the two million refugees and displaced people in Central America. At the prompting of the European Parliament, it was decided to create a budget line to enable the European Commission to give succour to projects in order to promote the self-sufficiency of refugees, displaced people and returnees in the ALA developing countries.



Photo: "Enfants Refugies du Monde"

The Esquipulas II Agreement

Concluded by the five Central American Presidents in August 1987, the peace plan comprises a set of principles and undertakings providing a basis for future diplomatic efforts for refugees. In particular on the conviction that peace and development are inextricably linked, and that lasting peace is possible only when the fate of refugees and displaced people has been resolved.

A Council Regulation (443/97/EC), approved on March 3, 1997, now governs the Community's activities designed to promote the self-sufficiency of uprooted people in the developing countries of Asia and Latin America. The legislative text specifies the recipients, the partners for implementing the activities and the kind of schemes the Community is backing.

People rediscovering their roots



International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA)

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A key component of the Esquipulas II Agreement is focused on the need to take charge of the myriad refugees and displaced people resulting from the regional crisis. In the wake of the constant demands the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) made to the authorities in the region, an international meeting on the refugee question was staged in 1989 in Guatemala under the name of CIREFCA. The Conference achieved the small miracle of persuading the leaders of the Central American States to meet around a table, even though they were still locked in a state of conflict. They gathered together to make meaningful commitments to work together to find a solution to the problem of displaced people, a problem affecting the entire region. Representatives of Central American Governments, together with donors, international agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs), took part in the conference, which resulted in a declaration and a concerted action plan. An assessment was made of all the refugees' needs so as to be able to find donors willing to cater for these needs. As a result of the process the conference set in motion, \$ 450 million was raised over five years for the benefit of uprooted people. The European Union is the main financial backer.



Photo: REDES

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Central American crisis is the way in which initiatives such as CIREFCA have helped give a fillip to political decisions, which, in turn, have led to the widespread return of peace and democracy, even though this process is still not complete.

- **Refugees and returnees**

Originally conceived for the benefit of refugees, CIREFCA, which unfolded in parallel with the peace-making process in the region, was gradually extended to cover more and more beneficiaries. As the peace process intensified, so the need to deal with the flight of refugees gave way to the requirement to organise repatriation activities. Nicaragua's change of Government in 1990 resulted in a large-scale repatriation operation involving 70,000 refugees and former Nicaraguan militants living in Honduras or Costa Rica. From 1990 onwards, greater priority was granted to programmes for returnees, who frequently were found to be living in insecure and dangerous conditions. At that time, support was of vital importance for calming the returnees' fears about their safety and thereby making it easier for them to become part of the mainstream of social life once more.

- **Uprooted people**

The number of people uprooted since 1979 is put at 2 million. However, only a tiny proportion of this total (some 165,000) were able to receive protection and assistance from the HCR. A further 900,000 Central Americans, whose names did not appear on any official lists, were dispersed throughout the region, living in constant fear of being expelled. An even greater number of people were displaced within their own countries and were unable to rely on any international protection or assistance. The CIREFCA "concerted action plan" established the overall shape of the strategies for achieving lasting solutions. This involved freely consented repatriation or the integration locally of the four groups of people displaced during the conflict: refugees, returnees, people displaced within a country and people displaced outside a country (people who have fled their country of origin but for various reasons have not been registered as refugees).



European Union-sponsored projects in the region are presently focused on refugees, displaced people, returnees and a new category: people who have been demobilised as a result of peace agreements and demilitarisation. These former militants also have to be reintegrated into civilian life. The general term "uprooted people" is used to refer to the whole range of beneficiaries..

- **Changes in the situation**

Since the first CIREFCA conference was held in 1989, the situation of displaced persons has changed considerably. It was estimated at that time that the number of displaced persons was about 2 million, of which 165,000 had refugee status. Up until 1994, the "joint plan" put into operation by the conference enabled the mobilisation of financial resources of international origin and their rational use for the benefit of displaced populations. A total of 438 million dollars was invested.

At the time of the official close of the Conference, the democratic authorities within each country had developed considerably and subsequent initiatives gave rise to new political and financial agreements.

The signing of peace agreements (El Salvador - 1992, Nicaragua - 1993, Guatemala - 1996), the processes of demobilisation leading to the restoration of the democratic process in the different countries of the isthmus, and the international support for these processes, have led to favourable changes in the situation of these peoples.

In 1996, though determining an exact figure for the number of displaced persons is a very difficult task, it is calculated that there is still a total of 190,000 external refugees and displaced persons, of which 79% originate from Central America. Persons displaced internally who are still outside their own countries or are in the process of integrating into the country of asylum, still number in the hundreds of thousands.

In spite of the improvement in the situation, the different categories of

population groups gathered together under the concept of "displaced populations" present, aside from the military conflict, specific circumstances which require support and monitoring in the search for concrete solutions: an improvement in the reliability of the food supply, the creation of jobs and income opportunities, the strengthening of local mechanisms for conflict resolution, support for increased legal documentation, a consolidation of the institutions which protect human rights, etc...



European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

5 Funds for reviving productive activities

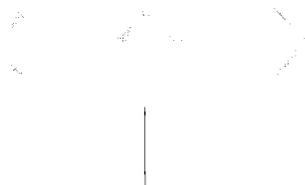


Photo: REDES

Providing farmers with training in crop-growing and animal husbandry techniques so as to boost the beneficiaries' production capacities.

The most devastated by the conflict and the most neglected by the Salvadoran Government, the northern area of the Morazán Department was deprived of any education or health services during the fighting and farm output declined sharply. In a bid to extricate themselves from this situation, most people formed themselves into communities and co-operatives. Christian Aid is lending direct support to these communities and the action they have taken to resolve their problems.

33-year-old Martin Ventura, who lives in Torola, is benefiting directly from the scheme. He has been awarded funds to boost his agricultural production. The training he has received has helped Martin to increase his maize output. The bigger harvests provide him with enough to maize to meet his own needs and a surplus that he has been able to sell. He says the project has taught him new production options, while helping to protect the environment.



European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

3 Boosting farm production in El Salvador

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Shaking off the subsistence mentality

As a direct result of the war, large areas of the countryside have been abandoned by farmers and the infrastructure has been destroyed. Ever since 1992, the REDES foundation has been lending assistance to the many families that resettled in these areas. Most of them had been living in refugee camps in Honduras. The people who have been "assisted" in these camps for several months now have to learn again how to take charge of their own lives and how to recreate normal social structures. The aim of the project is to help these people become independent again and encourage them to take initiatives to promote farm production. The main idea is to help these people shake off the subsistence mentality: as a result of this widespread attitude towards farming, people tend to confine their activities to growing basic cereals for their daily needs. The REDES foundation is seeking to steer the farmers' activities towards the production of cash crops.



Photo: REDES

*Farmers' families
are involved at all
stages of the
project.*

Providing incentives for assuming responsibility

Financial Committees have been set up for each area so as to ensure a direct contact with the people living there. Rural communities are directly involved. The purpose of these Committees is to democratise funding, help farmers to take responsibility for using funding and creating a profit, promote training and diversification in farm production and reduce the number of go-betweens involved in the marketing of farm produce. Generally speaking, the project has helped extend the productive capacities of 8,866 small recipient farmers. It has also enhanced their capacity to manage financial resources. Their socio-economic organisation has also been improved: five of the 41 communities covered by the project are being converted into co-operatives.

European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

Creating kindergartens

teaching health care

skills in Ixil Indian villages

Nearly 115,000 Ixil Indians are living in extremely precarious conditions in remote, barely accessible villages in Northern Guatemala. One of the reasons for their isolation is the inability of the public education system to reach remote rural regions and to provide them with the basic training they need to take part in the political, economic and social life of their country. The "Enfants Réfugiés du Monde" (ERM) organisation has decided to tackle the education problem at the most fundamental level by setting up kindergartens in the most remote communities. Children are provided with the opportunity to learn at play in these care facilities, where they are given nutritional supplements and medical inspections. The activities are conducted in the children's own language, but they are also gradually exposed to Spanish. The project involves building facilities, training local instructors and developing teaching resources for children. The next stage consists of obtaining official recognition for teaching staff so that the Ministry of Education takes responsibility for their wages.

Basic knowledge of health care and hygiene

Mortality rates among Ixil Indian women and children are the most disturbing ones in the country. The high mortality rates are blamed on the inadequate pre and post-natal care and care during labour. The entire population, starting with the children have to have a basic knowledge of health care and hygiene. The ERM project involves providing training for groups of midwives and health workers. These are responsible for using consultations to monitor pregnant women and children aged 0 to 5. In the school setting, 50 teachers are being given training in health education. The children act as messengers, thereby playing an active part in spreading the health message in their communities.



Photo: "Enfants Réfugiés du Monde"

"I didn't have the opportunity to write with a pencil when I was little. I don't want my daughter to have to dip her finger into some ink to sign her name".

Jacinta

European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

Enhancing the self-management capacity of the Ixil Indians



Photo "Enfants Réfugiés du Monde"

Enjoying European Union support, the Chajulense association aims to bolster initiatives developed by Ixil Indians to improve their quality of life.

38-year-old Maria Canacap Rivera is coordinating a "textiles" project involving some 300 Ixil women. "For me and my companions (who were already organised before the European Union decided to lend its support), it was a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the self-management dimension of our project. The regular income for our families has enabled us to improve our living conditions and in particular those of our children. The training we received has also enabled us to improve the quality of our products."

European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

3 **Developing** family-based
stock-farming among
the rural population

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Improving food supplies and incomes for people living in rural areas

Most of the people living in rural areas in Northern Guatemala are of Indian descent. Growing crops and raising animals on a small scale, they live in insecure conditions, which have been exacerbated by war and a flight from the land. The key aim of the "Vétérinaires sans Frontières" (VSF) project is to improve food supplies and incomes for these people. A programme of extremely practical activities has been developed: making it easier for farmers to gain access to animal health services (local veterinary dispensary, training for animal husbandry promoters able to look after animals), using stock-farming sites (community henhouses) to produce and ensure the dissemination of good quality animals, lending support to stock-farming promoters' associations and relying on a system of revolving credits to encourage the development of small agricultural holdings.



Photo: "Vétérinaires sans Frontières"

*A community henhouse in
Northern Guatemala*

"Stock-farming promoters' associations": independent, responsible partners

The long-term aim of the project is to induce local populations to become directly involved in developing the farm sector. Sponsored by VSF and run by local partners, stock-farming promoters' associations have a key part to play in training, technical support and logistics. They provide the framework required to ensure the survival of the initiatives taken.

European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety



Reducing the mortality rate amongst the indian population

Accounting for over 65% of the Guatemalan population, the Indian population does not have access to good quality health care and education services. The situation has been exacerbated by the war and the harm it did to the socio-economic conditions of these people. As a result of an upsurge of epidemics and the increasing number of marginal groups, these people are completely isolated.

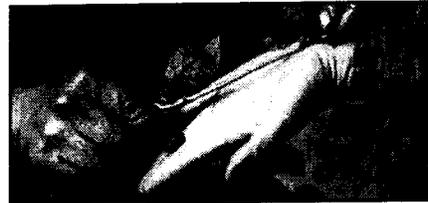


Photo: "Medecins sans Frontières"

Training traditional midwives in the use of plants.

Women and children: main beneficiaries

Focused on two particularly disadvantaged municipalities (Todos Santos and Cantinil), the "Médecins sans Frontières" (MSF) project is helping to reduce mortality rates among women and children, who are the main casualties of this isolation. Teams of health workers and traditional midwives are being trained on the spot to carry out curative, preventive and educational assignments. Run by a health worker, a pharmacy has been established in each of the municipalities.



"The act of building a rain water reservoir next to my home has improved our living conditions. My wife used to spend three hours a day going down the hill to fetch water. Now she is not so worn out and is therefore better able to carry out other tasks".

Albino

Ensuring the viability of a basic health care system

With the consent and active participation of local people, MSF has also created several projects for ensuring a more effective water supply system. Reservoirs for recovering and collecting drinking water have been built with the help of beneficiaries as well as water disposal systems.

The long-term aim of the project is to induce people to take responsibility for managing their own health care systems. Their involvement at all stages of the project (development, implementation and follow-up) is the sole guarantee of its viability.



European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

3 Providing training to refugees: a key asset with which to face the future

Several thousand Guatemalan refugees are still living in Mexico, mainly in the Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo States. After fleeing the violence in their country during the 1980s, they still hoped to be able to return to Guatemala one day. While waiting for their hopes to be fulfilled, some of the refugees have been able to qualify for the "Peace and Third World" project (finalised in August 1996), which enabled them to receive training and help further their personal development and that of the community. This is obviously a key asset with which to face the future. The project also focused on providing technical and social training to instructors chosen from the midst of the refugee people. A total of 1,136 refugees, from 72 camps, were able to benefit directly from the 15-month project.

"Previously, women used to take absolutely no part in the community development process. But as soon as they received training, they began to assume responsibilities in the context of their communities and other organised groups. They no longer remain on the sidelines. The idea that they "serve no useful purpose" has changed..."

Pablo



Pablo Calmo has been living in Mexico for 15 years, but has never forgotten "his" Guatemala...

He is hoping to return there at the end of 1997, if the conditions are right. He is aware of the difficulties already encountered by his companions who returned home: insecurity, no work, poor quality seeds, original training inappropriate to the new situation, etc. The training received in Mexico helps them to overcome numerous problems. The intensive "primary training" enables them to continue studying later on and to specialise. The agricultural training teaches them how to improve soils and diversify seeds. Teaching the refugees to read (mainly

the women) gives them a new image of themselves and makes them more responsible and willing to become involved. Not to mention the training related to administration, accounting, co-operatives, human rights, communication, the environment, etc. All these types of training offer refugees returning to Guatemala and those opting to stay in Mexico better opportunities for development and the possibility to become self-sufficient, wherever they may be.



European Union-sponsored projects: a wide variety

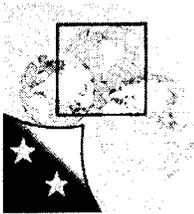


Projects financed
in the **1992-1996** period

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Ecus	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Colombia					800.000
Costa Rica				1.100.000	
El Salvador	10.000.000	6.160.000	2.060.000	2.105.000	4.550.000
Guatemala	1.250.000	4.900.000	3.350.000	5.945.000	5.520.000
Honduras			1.500.000		
Mexico	1.420.000	4.410.000	980.000	1.580.000	3.208.500
Nicaragua	5.900.000	1.100.000	16.110.000	4.880.000	6.572.300
Peru				3.000.000	
Regional Projects		330.000	810.000	690.000	790.000





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