



# Venezuela THANKS TO OFDA DART TEAM



TITLE: THANKS TO OFDA DART TEAM

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1. POST THANKS THE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS OF THE OFDA DART TEAM DISPATCHED TO VENEZUELA IN RESPONSE TO CATASTROPHIC RAINS AND FLOODS THAT HIT THIS COUNTRY ON DECEMBER 15-16. THIS TRAGEDY RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF BETWEEN 15,000 AND PERHAPS AS MANY AS 30,000 LIVES. THE FIRST MEMBERS OF THE OFDA TEAM ARRIVED ON DECEMBER 19, JUST DAYS AFTER THE CATASTROPHE. THROUGHOUT THE CRITICAL FIRST MONTH FOLLOWING THE TRAGEDY, OFDA MEMBERS CARRIED OUT ESSENTIAL ASSESSMENTS AND HELPED TO COORDINATE THE AID EFFORTS OF THE USG, THE GOV, AND VARIOUS NGOS TO GET FOOD, SHELTER AND, ABOVE ALL, WATER TO THE DISPLACED.

#### FIRST RESPONSE

2. OFDA DART TEAM LEADER ALEJANDRO JAMES LED THE DART TEAM AND CARRIED OUT ALL ASSESSMENTS IN VARGAS, MIRANDA, FALCON, AND TACHIRA STATES THROUGHOUT THE FIRST PHASE OF THE CRISIS. HIS INITIAL TEAM WAS COMPOSED OF FOUR OTHER PERSONS. MARK SCHOMER, THE DEPUTY TEAM LEADER, UNDERTOOK CRITICAL LIAISON AND COORDINATION WORK WITH NGOS AND THE UNDP. SCHOMER ALSO ARRANGED PHONE BRIDGES WITH WASHINGTON AND SAN JOSE. TOM DOLAN WAS THE DART TEAM'S MILITARY LIAISON. DOLAN "ROUGHED IT" FOR OVER A WEEK, LIVING AT MAIQUETIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, THE MAJOR REFUGEE EVACUATION CENTER AND THE PLACE WHERE THOUSANDS OF FLOOD VICTIMS CONGREGATED IN SEARCH OF AID IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DISASTER. LAURA

WILKINSON WORKED AS THE TEAM'S INFORMATION OFFICER, PREPARING DAILY ASSESSMENTS FOR OFDA ON THE SITUATION. JUAN PINELLA WAS THE TEAM'S COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT, HANDLING ALL PHONES, RADIOS AND COMPUTERS. IT WAS THIS FIRST TEAM THAT EFFECTIVELY DESIGNED AND INITIATED THE OVERALL U.S. RESPONSE TO THE TRAGEDY.

#### REPLACEMENTS ARRIVE

3. AFTER CHRISTMAS, ALL DART TEAM MEMBERS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF JAMES, WERE ROTATED BACK TO SAN JOSE AND REPLACED BY ANOTHER GROUP OF HIGHLY CAPABLE INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EXPERTS. GUY LAWSON SERVED AS THE DEPUTY TEAM LEADER. HE REGULARLY BRIEFED THE EMBASSY EMERGENCY ACTION COMMITTEE (EAC) ON OVERALL OFDA DART ACTIVITIES, SET UP PHONE BRIDGES AND COORDINATED MEETINGS OF AID DONORS. JACINTO RODRIGUEZ CARRIED OUT LIAISON WITH THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY AND HANDLED THE EXCEEDINGLY FRUSTRATING AND COMPLEX WATER ISSUES THAT FOLLOWED THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS. IN PARTICULAR, MR. RODRIGUEZ WORKED HARD TO SYNCHRONIZE THE EFFORTS OF THE VENEZUELAN WATER AUTHORITIES (HIDROVEN AND HIDROCAPITAL) AND THOSE OF THE WATER ENGINEERS THAT THE OFDA DART TEAM HAD BROUGHT TO VENEZUELA TO INSTALL HIGH-VOLUME, U.S. PRODUCED TEMPEST WATER PURIFICATION SYSTEMS. MR. RODRIGUEZ ALSO REGULARLY BRIEFED THE EAC ON WATER ISSUES.

#### HAZMAT TEAM: THE CHEM BUSTERS

4. ONE OF THE MOST OMINOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INITIAL DISASTER ASSESSMENT WAS THE DISCOVERY OF A HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SPILL AT LA GUAIRA PORT. ON JANUARY 4, A SPECIAL HAZMAT TEAM ARRANGED BY OFDA ARRIVED IN VENEZUELA. THE GROUP WAS LED BY DR. MARK KEIM OF THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL. THIS TEAM FACED AN EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT TASK, ONE BOTH SCIENTIFIC AND DIPLOMATIC. THEY HAD TO, FIRST, MAKE THE VENEZUELAN'S AWARE OF THE GRAVITY OF THE HAZMAT SPILL AT LA GUAIRA AND, SECOND, ENCOURAGE A COORDINATED RESPONSE AMONG DIFFERENT GOV AGENCIES. KEIM, IN PARTICULAR, IS TO BE PRAISED FOR HIS ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE BAD NEWS TO HIS HOSTS WITHOUT PUTTING THEM OFF. NATHALIE DREYFUS OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD WROTE THEIR DAILY REPORTS AND SERVED AS THE TEAM'S TRANSLATOR. EDWARD CABLES, ALSO OF THE USCG, WORKED WITH THE LA GUAIRA FIRE DEPARTMENT IN THE INITIAL ON-SITE RESPONSE TO THE HAZMAT SITUATION. ALAN HUMPHREY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA) PERFORMED LIAISON WITH UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS IN VENEZUELA RESPONSIBLE FOR TESTING SOIL AND WATER SAMPLES. THE ENTIRE TEAM'S FINAL REPORT, A COMPREHENSIVE THIRTY-PAGE DOCUMENT THAT BECAME THE CHARTER FOR THE VENEZUELAN'S RESPONSE, WAS WRITTEN IN ONE WEEKEND.

#### WATER

5. OFDA ALSO CONTRACTED THE SERVICES OF SEVERAL WATER EXPERTS. DR. RODDY TEMPEST, OF TEMPEST ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS, ARRIVED ON CHRISTMAS DAY AND BEGAN THE INSTALLATION OF HIS TEMPEST MOBILE WATER PURIFICATION UNITS. IN THIS HE WAS ASSISTED BY DR. JANELLE DAANE AND ROBERT BROX. ALL THREE WORKED EXTRAORDINARY HOURS TO INSTALL TEMPEST PURIFICATION SYSTEMS IN THE HARSH EST CONDITIONS. UNLIKE OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS, THE VENEZUELAN FLOODING CONTINUES. CONSEQUENTLY, THE WATER TEAM HAD TO CONTEND WITH THE ELEMENTS. SITES WERE SOMETIMES BUILT AND THEN WASHED OUT THE NEXT DAY. WATERS THAT MIGHT BE CLEAR ONE DAY WOULD RUN MUDDY THE NEXT, AND TRIPS BY HELICOPTER OFTEN HAD TO BE CANCELLED DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER. IN THE END, THE TEAM SUCCEEDED

IN INSTALLING NINE HIGH-VOLUME TEMPEST SYSTEMS AND IN TRAINING LOCAL PERSONNEL FROM THE WATER AUTHORITIES IN THEIR USE. IN FACT, THE WATER PRODUCTION SYSTEM HAS BECOME SUFFICIENTLY EFFECTIVE SO THAT HIDROVEN IS NOW UNDERTAKING EFFORTS TO USE THE TEMPESTS TO RE-START STILL-VIABLE PARTS OF THE OLD WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM.

6. THE EMBASSY EXPRESSES ITS PROFOUND THANKS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE VARIOUS RELIEF TEAMS. ALL WORKED 12-18 HOUR DAYS, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK DURING THEIR STAYS IN VENEZUELA. MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR OFFICIAL RECOGNITION, MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE HIGHLY POSITIVE ARTICLES IN THE VENEZUELAN PRESS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS, ARE THE EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE THAT MEMBERS OF THE OFDA TEAM WILL NEVER HEAR. THESE ARE THE WORDS OF INDIVIDUAL VENEZUELAN CITIZENS, THE SHELL-SHOCKED SURVIVORS OF THE FLOODS WHO, AFTER SUFFERING INCALCULABLE MATERIAL AND EMOTIONAL LOSSES, RECEIVED FOOD, WATER, SHELTER AND ASSURANCE OF LONG-TERM SAFETY THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF THE DEDICATED INDIVIDUALS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

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