



Honduras / Nicaragua—December 2007 with the UN World Food Program

INTRODUCTION

In December 2007 Cat Cora, president and founder of Chefs for Humanity, and I had the profound experience of traveling through Honduras and Nicaragua with the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). The World Food Program is the largest international food aid organization combating hunger in under-developed nations with severe food shortages. This was an amazing opportunity for us to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing hunger relief and see first hand the breath and scope of hunger that results from poverty, climate change and emergency situations such as hurricane Felix.

NICARAGUA

After a full day of flying, our journey took us to one of the costal ports of the NAAR Region – the National Autonomous Atlantic Region of Nicaragua, the area also known as Mosquito Coast. Bilwi is a costal community dependant on the abundance of the Caribbean Sea for survival. It is an area of sea, swamps, rivers and what used to be dense jungle. In September of 2007 Hurricane Felix devastated this region with a category 5 storm, 270 kilometer winds and 12 inches of rain.

Even prior to Felix the NAAR region was one of the poorest and most vulnerable areas with 61% of the population living below the poverty line. The population here is Mestizos and various indigenous groups who rely on daily wage labor, fishing and subsistence agricultural production which is also the main food source. Communities are isolated with limited access to markets – most communities have to travel over 6 hours to reach a market or health care.

Hurricane Felix affected approximately 168 villages throughout the region – absolutely flattening what was a thriving jungle – clearing the region of natural food and wildlife sources and destroying livelihoods related to domestic animal, fishing or agriculture. The rivers are emptied of fish; boats which were needed for travel and income were destroyed. 80,000 people are food insecure and of these many are eating only one meal day – mainly rice, with some palm fruit, beans, oil and sugar.

The World Food Program is currently providing emergency food assistance to approximately 60% of the affected population – with funding ending in March of 2008. We were amazed to learn that the WFP team was on the ground prior to the start of this hurricane – anticipating the affect

of the storm. WFP mobilized quickly and within the first 14 days had distributed 88 metric tons of food!

Cat and I participated in a food distribution where a village had walked an hour and twenty minutes to receive food and then had to turn around and hike back the same distance with 40 plus pounds of food bags on their backs.

The people we met here were scared and still in shock from the storm and devastation. But of everything we saw and experienced – nothing struck our hearts as much as the people of Wawa Boom. Of all the villages Wawa Boom is the only village that was dislocated due the hurricane. The people have had to move their homes away from the river to avoid continual flooding. They have lost everything. They are living in houses of sticks with USAID plastic tarps, on a muddy ground, sleeping on wood planks and eating one meal a day – usually of rice. Their agricultural fields (2 to 5 hours away by boat or walking) were destroyed, the fish in the river where they fished are dead. There are 347 people in this community, 77 of whom are children less than 5 years old. There are two small wells on the property and water filters for most of the living shelters have been provided. There are no latrines, no electricity, and the population relies almost completely on the WFP food rations. The children have no shoes, and are required to walk around in mud and are constantly exposed to contamination. There are random visits from the ministry of health.

The people of Wawa Boom need food, seeds, soap, agricultural tools, housing and basic services. Chefs for Humanity has made a commitment to raise funds to support Wawa Boom throughout 2008 and 2009 to restore their village at their new location and help them regain their of self-sufficiency.

Before we left the area we provided all of the children and young adults with shoes, and we are currently purchasing a chain saw. For more information on the 2008/2009 recovery plan for Wawa Boom see the Wawa Boom Project Outline.

Diane Burstein, Executive Director

Chefs for Humanity