

IICA gears up to support the people of Haiti

- *It is coordinating its actions with the international organizations with which it also implements development projects in Haiti.*
- *A network has been set up to get aid to the Institute's 50 officials based in Haiti.*

San Jose, 18 January 2010 (IICA). The new Director General of IICA, Víctor M. Villalobos, announced that “Doing everything possible to help the people of Haiti will be my first task at the helm of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.”

Villalobos took up his post on Friday, 15 January in a solemn ceremony that was tinged with sadness, given the tragedy that struck Haiti three days earlier.

Among the dignitaries who took part in the ceremony were the President of Costa Rica, Óscar Arias Sánchez; the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza; the President of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture and Minister of Agriculture of Jamaica, Christopher Tufton; and the Secretary of Agriculture of Mexico, Francisco Mayorga.

The participants - who also included members of the diplomatic corps and senior government officials from Costa Rica and Mexico - observed a minute of silence as a mark of respect for the people of Haiti.

Plan for support

As soon as the severity of the earthquake became apparent, IICA set up a task force to design and implement a plan in support of Haiti, comprised of officials at Headquarters (in Costa Rica) and coordinated by Francois Dagenais, whose unit seeks resources for externally-funded projects, and the Institute's Representatives in Haiti, Alfredo Mena, and the Dominican Republic, Víctor del Ángel.

In Washington, meanwhile, the IICA personnel actively involved in the “Friends of Haiti Group” are coordinating actions with the other inter-American agencies based in the U.S. capital.

The task force intends to tap the experience of staff members in the English-speaking Caribbean and the Dominican Republic who have dealt with previous emergencies and disasters in the region.

IICA is also contacting a number of agencies with which it implements projects in Haiti with a view to redirecting efforts and resources in response to the emergency. Some of these agencies are based in countries such as Canada, Argentina, the United States, and Brazil.

A major priority has been to confirm the safety of the Institute's nearly 50 staff in Haiti and their families. Fortunately, the local IICA Representative, Alfredo Mena, reports that they are all alive.

The earthquake did not damage the Institute's premises in the devastated Haitian capital and the Director General immediately ordered that they be made available to Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture and other agencies that are helping to deal with the emergency.

The Director General also decided that the operation to get assistance to Haiti should work out of IICA's Office in Santo Domingo, given the enormous difficulties and lack of infrastructure in Port-au-Prince.

At the end of last week, a convoy left Santo Domingo for Port-au-Prince to deliver food and first aid supplies to our officials, many of whom lost their homes.

A network to provide assistance is now operational, coordinated by the Human Resources Division and made up of various associations, such as the IICA staff association (APIICA), the association of staff at Headquarters and the Office in Costa Rica (ASEIICA), and the spouses of the Institute's international personnel (ADIICA). Resources are also being provided by the Institute's Emergency Support Program.

Reconstruction

As soon as the situation permits, IICA will undertake an assessment of the damage in rural areas, followed by a broader evaluation of the most pressing needs and how best to meet them, especially with regard to food production in the rural areas surrounding Port-au-Prince.

IICA also intends to prepare specific projects to contribute to the reconstruction of the agricultural sector and support the management of the funding involved, taking advantage of the experience acquired through successful initiatives such as Pro-Huerta, Oxfam-Quebec-IICA and Kredifam.

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