

VAMOS ADELANTE FOUNDATION



Director: Nina Jorgensen
Courier Address to Guatemala:
444 Brickell Ave.
Suite # 53-8570
Miami, FL 331 31, USA

Address in Guatemala:
2 Avenida Sur #6a
San Juan del Obispo
Antigua, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: +502 7830 6485

VamosAdelante@conexion.com.gt
www.vamosadelante.org



Dear Friends of Proyecto Vamos Adelante,

On Sunday, October 2 Hurricane Stan hit Guatemala bringing four days of pouring rain and devastation. Hundreds of people in Santiago Atitlan were swept away in the middle of the night when the water-filled crater of the nearby volcano came blasting through leaving unknown numbers of bodies buried beneath several feet of mud.

Those of us in Zapote were safe, but stranded, as we watched the local rivers turn into ferocious rapids. Though the lives of those associated with Vamos Adelante were spared, many of their homes were not as flood waters tore through leaving the poorest people with nothing.

Help arrived via the German Embassy on Saturday evening. A big truck containing food and other relief items, accompanied by an SUV full of Guatemalan soldiers and help from the German Embassy, was sent to the Vamos Adelante base in Zapote to be distributed to the various villages. It was a slow trip in the dark on the narrow, muddy roads. As we neared Zapote, the truck became stuck in the mud and fell into a deep long- lasting coma. Following fruitless attempts to restart the truck, a tractor from the finca in Zapote was called on to assist. The truck was eventually pulled out and moving again.



When we finally arrived in Zapote the Vamos Adelante promoters were ready and waiting to greet the German Embassy representatives. Several children who have scholarships with Vamos Adelante were also present and had been organized into an assembly line to unload the food.

The rain poured down, but the assembly line process worked through it very smoothly and quickly. The boxes were tossed out of the truck and swung through the line before being strategically stacked throughout the clinic. By the time the truck was emptied, everyone was sweaty, exhausted and soaked to the bones.



The presence of several Guatemalan soldiers ensured safe travels on the dangerous roads and provided additional assistance in the large task of unloading the truck full of food.

Thankfully, the trip home was easier, though rather adventurous. It was after 10:00 p.m. when the German Embassy vehicle dropped us off in Antigua and headed back to the capital. We waded down one of the infamous little tuk-tuks to whisk us over the bumpy and chilly cobblestone streets of Antigua before finally arriving at the Vamos Adelante office again.



The German Embassy was so impressed with the efficiency and organization of everything on Saturday night that they sent one more truck than they had originally intended to Vamos Adelante on Sunday afternoon. Included in the convoy were four embassy vehicles carrying Guatemalan soldiers, several more representatives of the German Embassy as well as the ambassador himself. The rain continued and the roads and rivers worsened as the parade of vehicles forded each river one-by-one.



Unfortunately, one truck did not have initial success in crossing this river. Well over an hour was spent trying everything and anything that could be thought of to push, pull or dig the truck out of the muck and water. However as time passed, the river strengthened and the truck sank deeper into the mud.

Once again, the tractor from the finca Magdalena was called on to come to the rescue. In the meantime, the rest of the convoy moved ahead past Zapote, towards the very remote, lower villages of Nispero, Belice and Esmeralda. This is where the flood waters collected and these already very poor people took the brunt of the storm as some of their homes were washed away in the mucky waters.



However, this plan was also temporarily delayed when Nina's jeep, leading the caravan, drowned after diving into the deep rut of the final river, causing water to splash up to the windshield. Nina jumped out, popped open the hood, yelled for a dry cloth and very efficiently fixed her vehicle. In the meantime a family passing by used her car for support. Then we all hopped out into the foot and a half of rushing water and gave the car a little push start as it successfully jumped out of the hole and onto land.



Continuing past Zapote, when the roads became too narrow, steep and slippery for the trucks to travel, we stopped. The German ambassador, Mr. Claude Ellner, helped organize the people who had walked all the way down from their villages to meet the trucks. Using the assembly line system, bags of emergency aid that had been prepared by the embassy was distributed to these families as a form of immediate relief.

As it was getting late and dark, the remainder of the bulk food items in the three trucks was sent back to the base in Zapote to be divided and distributed later this week. Once again, the assembly line was back in action. Only this time everything was being filmed by a Guatemalan television station to be shown on the news.



The clinic began to feel smaller and smaller as food was stacked up everywhere. Here are only a few of the boxes of canned beans and the 50 pound sacks of maseca, used to make tortillas. The maseca sacks proved to be too heavy for the assembly line and had to be carried in one by one. All the promoters, students and volunteers lined up as the men in the trucks placed the heavy, dusty sacks on each person's head or back to be stacked.



The Vamos Adelante promoters had to work efficiently and quickly to also organize the soups, salt, rice, milk, hygiene articles, cooking oil and additional pre-prepared emergency relief bags into tall but orderly stacks as the flow of goods moved continually along the assembly line.

Very heavy stacks of blankets were also sent by the embassy. These blankets will be distributed to the poor families who have lost everything to the floods and mudslides.



Conditions still worsen though the hurricane has passed. Even a week later, the rain continues to come down adding to the flooding and resulting in several mudslides that have wiped out many homes and blocked the roads between villages. This has left people who previously only had a decrepit structure for a house with nothing. Additionally, the Vamos Adelante promoters are now unable to access some of the villages to deliver help.



With many thanks to the German Embassy, it was a weekend of rewarding and crucial work. As the crops in this region have all been flooded and mostly destroyed, these people have been left with no food and steep market prices to contend with. Furthermore, Hurricane Stan has left families such as this woman's with nothing, not even their homes. Thanks to this help, they now have something to sustain them for a short time.

Thank you so much for showing concern this past week. Fortunately, the villages associated with Vamos Adelante are temporarily taken care of as a result of the generous donation delivered this past weekend. This week will be spent distributing the food to families in dire need. However, many more serious problems lie ahead for the poor people here. The mudslides and continual rain foreshadow the severity of months ahead for Vamos Adelante and these rural Guatemalan families as everyone struggles to survive and rebuild.

Warm Regards from the whole Vamos Adelante team,

Nina and Erin (short-term volunteer)

