



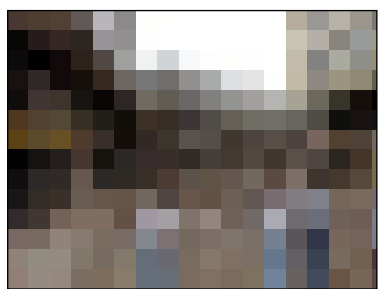
Assistance Experiences in a Catastrophe

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On January 25, 1999 an earthquake measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale shook the «Eje Cafetero» area (the coffee growing region) of Colombia. On receiving reports of the disaster, Andiasistencia reacted immediately by putting into action a three point contingency plan:

- Setting up an operations centre in the area.
- Sending qualified personnel (doctors, paramedics, professionals in on-site repairs, drivers, etc.)
- Sending aid equipment (lifting equipment, ambulances, medical aircraft, electrical plant, communication systems).

This was done in order to give humanitarian aid, and provide all the beneficiaries of the assistance services with immediate and efficient aid at a moment when time is of the essence.



The operation was set up in such a manner that on the day of the event, the first civil aeroplane which landed in the city of Armenia was Andiasistencia's medical team. Medical aircraft were stationed in the cities of Medellin, Pereira and Bogota, ready to fly to Armenia on receiving government go-ahead.

The process was given added impetus by coordinating with a large mutual company and with the health and work ministries and through contacts with the country's disaster prevention and aid department (Oficina de Atencion y Prevencion de Desastres de la Presidencia de la Republica). This allowed medical aircraft to help that night with the evacuation of citizens requiring specialised medical treatment in major hospitals in nearby cities.

Simultaneously, a fleet of lifting equipment and on-site assistance travelled by land from the cities of Bogota, Medellin and Cali in order to set up the operations centre in the affected area. This fleet entered the city of Armenia at 6 a.m. on the day following the tragedy, and located a site provided with emergency electricity generating equipment and communication facilities via mobile telephones allowing contact with the alarm centre in Bogota. Improvised claims handling offices were set up on the site for various insurers and a policyholder information service was set up by FASECOLDA (the union of Colombian insurers).

Andiasistencia's role in the catastrophe allowed the efficiency of the network which had been set up in order to solve immediate problems to be measured; although it had not been designed to cope with catastrophic accidents, its strength and vitality were brought to the forefront. The capacity for action and reaction is a critical problem in countries such as Colombia which are located in

regions of high seismic hazard, and where the response of state and aid bodies is hindered by a lack of sufficient resources to allow for immediate aid. An assistance company however, which also has at its disposal similar networks in neighbouring countries, may provide timely and efficient help, not only for state bodies, but also for the many clients which in one way or another have commercial, personal or humanitarian interests in the affected areas.



Thanks to the presence of Andiasistencia, in the 16 days following the event, it was possible to carry out a total of 98 airlifts of injured people using the medical and rescue flights, 54 aid actions of lesser degree, 112 rubble removal operations, the coordination of two flights with humanitarian aid consisting of drugs, drinking water, electrical plant, food, clothing and various donations, and finally the search for family members and missing persons. ■