

Mitch leaves nation in ruins

No water. No food. No electricity. No phones. Few houses remain; many people sleep in a fruit packing plant.

No roads. No bridges. The only access is by helicopter, but flights are rare—usually to evacuate sick or injured.

There is plenty of mud—as far as the eye can see.

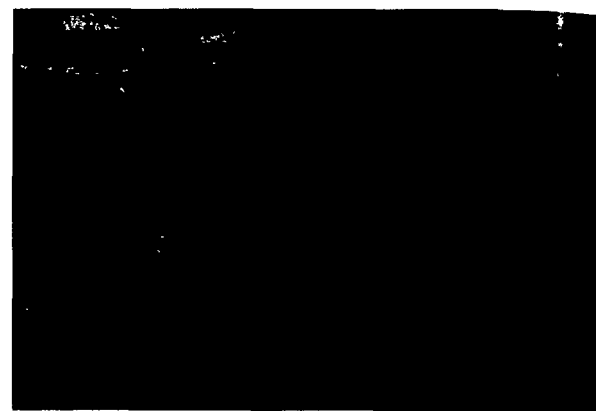


As people look at bean and corn fields, plantain and banana plants, yucca stalks and rice all equally laid to waste by Hurricane Mitch, they worry about hunger. They worry about people stealing what little there is left. And they worry about merchants taking advantage of the situation. This is particularly true in the Mosquitia, where between 90 and 100 percent of crops were lost.

Rescue teams were undermanned and underequipped to help the thousands stranded on rooftops or high ground. Telephone service and electricity were down in many communities. And the initial lack

of police or military presence in the cities allowed hundreds of looters to ransack unprotected residences and businesses.

When I came inside the room, Ignacia, a young woman of 22, stood up and walked toward me as if she wanted to say something, but didn't. Instead, she returned to her chair and sat there while looking at me silently. I explained to her I wanted to conduct an interview, and perhaps the chance of being taken note of in the middle of all those thousands of people encouraged her to come forward.



"I come from la Colonia Villa Nueva, Sector 2; do you know where it is?" she told me. "Well, our house had sunk in the edge of the ravine. We lost all our possessions; we get a little bread and a cup of coffee. I give a little bit of bread to my kid next to me because babies and little kids won't get milk until the next day at ten. That's about it."

Bodies are everywhere, victims of landslides and the waters. The most conservative calculations estimate thousands, not hundreds of deaths. Many municipal governments have begun to run out of food and potable water. The capital of Republic is in a disastrous, calamitous situation. On top of it all, the death of Tegucigalpa Mayor Dr. César Castellanos in a fatal helicopter accident while working with relief efforts has left citizens desolate.

Overflowing rivers and landslides have caused complete barrios to disappear even though extensive preventive efforts were made for early evacuations, but still not all the affected were able to be saved; many victims have for more than five days sat on the roofs of their homes, without food, exposed to the weather, waiting to be rescued.

U.S. proposed \$950 million more to help rebuild region