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Deborah Tyroler

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Natural Disaster Experts Issue Recommendations To Nicaraguan Government

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 23, Nicaraguan Minister of Construction and Transportation Jaime Icabalceta inaugurated a three-day seminar on research related to natural disasters. The event was designed to coincide with activities marking the 20th anniversary of the Dec. 23, 1972 earthquake in Managua. Over 10,000 people were killed during the 1972 earthquake, which leveled Managua's city center and destroyed over 80% of the capital's housing. Experts from Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Mexico, the US, Japan, Israel and Europe participated in the event with dissertations on themes including volcanology, seismology, tidal waves, and anti-seismic building codes. Participants in the seminar drafted a series of proposals for a natural disaster research agenda and discussed preventative measures which could diminish the impact of natural disasters. Although the primary issue addressed during the meeting was the threat of a massive earthquake, other potential natural disasters were also discussed. In the past five years alone, Nicaragua has suffered extensive material and human losses from a hurricane, volcano eruptions, a tidal wave, as well as seasonal droughts and flooding. President Violeta Chamorro attended the official closing ceremony at the seminar. Participants presented Chamorro with a list of recommendations aimed at mitigating the effects of future natural disasters. In particular, they called on the government to play a more active role providing support for research in the face of what was characterized as the inevitability of future large-scale earthquakes in the western part of the country. Other recommendations included: *

- * As urgent priorities, the government should establish a national network for detection of seismic activity and establish anti-seismic construction plans for both rural and urban areas. Since the 1972 Managua earthquake, extensive construction has taken place on or near seismic fault lines.
- * Drafting of new anti-seismic building codes.
- * Establish a new office to oversee inspection of building materials and of construction companies, and write a mandatory insurance law to cover natural disaster-related losses.
- * Implement public awareness campaigns which would facilitate efforts to confront natural disasters, and provide a new legal framework to regulate the Civil Defense Committee.

(Sources: Agence France-Presse, 11/26/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 11/23/92, 11/26/92)

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