

2005 Guatemala News – Hurricane Stan

Ron Amberg, Communications

Number 9, October 11, 2005

Spring Valley United Methodist Church

Hurricane Stan hit Central America as a major storm on October 6th, bringing rainfall and deadly mudslides to Guatemala. Correspondence has transpired within our 2005 Guatemala Mission Team, to those we know at the Salud y Paz Clinics in Camanchaj and Urbina.



Guatemala news on Hurricane Stan

Correspondence between our Spring Valley Guatemala Mission Team and Salud y Paz

From: Stephen and Bekki Beverly (of our 2005 Guatemala Mission Team)

To: SVUMC Guatemala Mission Team members

Sunday, October 09, 2005 10:19 AM

Subject: mudslide in Guatemala

Hey everybody,

Bekki and I were just looking in the news and noticed that the big mudslide in Guatemala occurred in and around the town of Solola (that's where we picked up the lumber for the bunk beds) and at Santiago, Atitlan (across the lake from where Adolfo took us to the scenic lookout).

We were just wondering if there is anything that we can do to send some help to the area of if there is anything else that we can do to help those people.

Let us know if anyone has any ideas.

Thanks,
Stephen and Bekki

From: Elizabeth Gross

To: SVUMC Guatemala Mission Team members

Monday, October 10, 2005 12:06 PM

Subject: Fwd: update Project Salud y Paz Guatemala

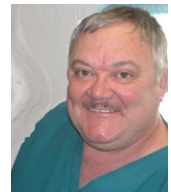
Many of you are aware that the area near Lake Atitlan was hit by mudslides as a result of Hurricane Stan. There may be as many as 1000 people buried alive and presumed dead. We received this message from Phil [Plunk] today. I will advise you of any other updates we receive. I have also written Daniel.

From: Dr. Phil Plunk, Director, Salud y Paz, Comanchaj Clinic and Urbina (Xela) Clinic

To: Robert & Elizabeth Gross; Roger Martens

Date: 10 Oct 2005 15:05:26 -0000

Subject: update Project Salud y Paz Guatemala



It seems the world has been hit by several true tragedies during the past weeks. Now Guatemala is among them. I thought you might be wondering the situation. Here is a short update. Will try to send out more later.

I am traveling my normal Fall trip in the U.S., so missed all the stuff-----kind of.

Everyone with the clinics and the clinics themselves are OK. The river got up to within a few feet of the clinic in Xela, but did not reach it. Roads are all out all over the country. All roads into and out of Pana where I was living are still

out. You can WALK down all the way from Solola which I could do, but then what? This fat boy could not walk back UP!!

It looks like my house and everything I have there is probably destroyed. So I had been laughing at my two heavy suitcases saying "I brought everything I own, that's why they are so heavy." Turns out maybe that's true! We need prayers and a lot more. Thanks,

Phil Plunk

Message sent by Elizabeth Gross to Daniel Dominguez (the interpreter for our Guatemala Mission Team):

Good Morning Daniel

This is Elizabeth in Dallas writing you. We have heard about the horrible mudslides in Guatemala and was hoping that you and Chichi are ok. Give us a report so we can notify the rest of the team. Are the roads open to Chichi? Are prayers are with you, your family and your people. With His Blessings, Elizabeth

Reply received from Daniel Dominguez:

From: [daniel dominguez ixtuc](#)
To: [Robert Gross](#)
Sent: Tuesday, October 11, 2005 1:03 PM
Subject: HELLO ELIZABETH

THIS IS DANIEL IN CHICHI WE ARE VERY WELL IN CHICHI THE ROUD IS OPEN LAST WEEK THE ROUD TO GUATE IS NOT OPE IT WAS RAINIG VERY HARD WE HAD LANDSLIDES IN DIFERENT TOWNS OF GUATEMALA THERE ARE WHO LOS FAMILY AND HOUSES PRAY FOR US IN MY CHURCH THERE IS A TOWN IN SANTIAGO ATITLAN MANY FAMILY S LOST MEMEBER OF THE FAMILY THEY ARE VERY SAD SOON DANIEL GOD BLESS YUO

From: Chris Nee, Administrative Assistant, Salud y Paz, in Guatemala
(Chris is a good friend of Peg Gilbert, of our 2005 Guatemala Mission Team)



Sunday, October 09, 2005 6:19 PM
Subject: Guatemala hurricane

Have attached an article by Reuters regarding the devastation of Hurricane Stan.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, we travel in our 12 person van to a village called Camanchaj (near Chichicastenango). It usually takes us 1.5 to 2 hours. Tuesday we began to receive phone calls reporting the bad weather's effect on the roads. The cold rain kept some patients home so we were able to leave a little early and found numerous land slides of trees and mud blocking the roads. It was amazing how quickly the Guatemala officials moved to clear the roads and it took us 5 hours to get home. We were some of the lucky ones. Later we learned that the road was totally impassable and remains so today (Sunday) as the rain continues.

We were without electricity and water for several days but collected rain water, which was in abundance, to flush and boil. I had a flashlight and lots of candles so all seemed well. My town of Quetzaltengango (a valley in high altitude) has some fatalities and many homes within 5 miles of my apartment had mud/water up to their roofs. Volunteer centers and collection sites sprang up all over town. Homeless persons were collected into shelters and the digging out began. Communication has not been the best here and today, when my Internet at home came back, I read the N.Y. Times to learn of greater devastation nearby. We pass the road to Lake Atitlan every time we travel to Camanchaj and I am holding the backpack, etc of an American student who went to the Lake to study Spanish for 2 weeks. It is my understanding that they evacuated many U.S. citizens but I have not heard from her.

The local clinic in Urbina was within 3-4 meters of the river breaching our gates. Again we were so lucky! Tomorrow we will meet to organize some rural clinics that have been without medical access. We will load up the van with meds and help where we can. (Luckily, again, I saw the long lines at the gas stations last week and filled the tank of the van that "lives" in front of my apartment.)

I will keep you posted on our work here. Hopefully, the rain will stop soon and we can get back to normal.

Love to all.....Chris

Guatemala Blamed for Slow Aid to Mudslide Village
By REUTERS
Published: October 9, 2005

Filed at 6:14 p.m. ET

PANABAJ, Guatemala (Reuters) - Aid trickled into a Guatemalan village devastated by a mudslide that killed some 1,400 people, and Maya Indian residents complained on Sunday the government was far too slow to react to the tragedy.

Peasants from neighboring villages brought coats and clothing for the victims, rowing canoes across Lake Atitlan to Panabaj. The town was buried under a deadly slick of mud, rocks and trees that slid down a volcano after heavy rains from Hurricane Stan.

Spanish firemen arrived to look for bodies under a quagmire that is up to 40 feet deep in places and Guatemalan soldiers brought water in a truck.

But government help was little and late, local officials said. They were angry that President Oscar Berger had not visited the village four days after one of Latin America's biggest tragedies of recent years struck.

"I feel totally sad, morale is very low. We want to see the president, we want to see him here," said Diego Esquina, mayor of Santiago Atitlan municipality, which runs Panabaj.



GUATEMALA CITY - Guatemalan officials said they would abandon communities buried by landslides and declare them mass graveyards as reports of devastation trickled in from some of the more than 100 communities cut off from the outside world after killer mudslides

Stan's rains triggered the mudslide as Panabaj's residents slept early on Wednesday.

No senior government official went to the village and the mayor said racism against the Mayas might be to blame for their lack of interest.

"It's like they are giving a message that it is because we are indigenous. That is the point. A lot of my people are saying it is because we are indigenous," Esquina said.

Santiago Atitlan was a hot spot during Guatemala's 36-year civil war, which ended in 1996. Years of abuses by soldiers helped leftist rebels recruit Indians in the town and tensions

peaked in 1990 when drunken soldiers killed 13 locals.

BEAN SUPPLIES

A supply of beans, rice and pasta sent by the capital's city hall was handed out on Sunday but peasants said the federal government was negligent.

"The government didn't send anything here. There is nothing," said Francisco Boron, 43, dressed in traditional calf-length white pants and carrying a machete.



SANTIAGO ATITLAN, Guatemala - Rescue teams have pulled 64 bodies from a mudslide that swept over a Guatemalan village. It is the worst single tragedy caused by flooding that killed more than 240 people in Central America and southern Mexico. Hundreds of homes in the Maya Indian lakeside town of Santiago Atitlan were swallowed up when a hillside collapsed under heavy rains earlier this week

Rescuers with hand tools struggled to find bodies in the brown grunge covering Panabaj, and local officials said it would likely be left as a mass grave.

The fire department put the death toll at around 1,400 villagers and Esquina said between 1,000 and 1,500 had died.

The storm killed some 300 people elsewhere in Guatemala and 103 others in the rest of Central America and southern Mexico.

Guatemalan newspaper reports said several hundred people died at another landslide in the department of San Marcos near the Mexican border and some 2,000 were missing, but that could not be confirmed.

Defense Minister Carlos Aldana told Reuters the armed forces were trying to reach the stricken area.

“San Marcos is the place where, from today, we are giving most importance because it has not been dealt with at all due to the weather conditions and the road access,” he said.

Around half a dozen light airplanes used by the army tried to fly to San Marcos on Sunday with food supplies but had to turn back 30 miles away at the town of Retalhuleu because of thick cloud in the mountains.

Oliver Piedrasanta, 27, a fireman in that town, said whole neighborhoods in San Marcos had been buried by mud.

At Panabaj, firefighters poked long poles into the mud in search of victims but feared sinking into the quagmire themselves.

“It is very difficult. Most of the people are where the mud is thickest and we haven't been able to work there because of the danger,” said firefighter Max Chiquito.

Emergency services did not reach the mountainous area until Friday because roads were cut off by landslides.

Pope Benedict offered condolences for the hurricane victims during his weekly blessing to the Roman Catholic faithful in St. Peter's Square.

“I ask the Lord for the eternal rest of the dead,” he said. “I also call on institutions and people of good will to lend a help in a spirit of true brotherly solidarity.”

Chris Nee
Apartado Postal #65
Quetzaltenango, 9001
Guatemala, Central America