



## HURRICANE LEAVES DESTRUCTION IN ITS WAKE

Carlos Maibeth, Miskitu from Waspan, Rio Coco, and a SAIC member, recently returned from a trip to the Atlantic Coast, devastated by Hurricane Joan last October 22-23. Now, three months later, the impacts are still very much being felt.

Q: What was the purpose of your trip?

A: To witness the impacts of the hurricane up close, and to talk to my people—Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, and blacks to meet with them and share their pain.

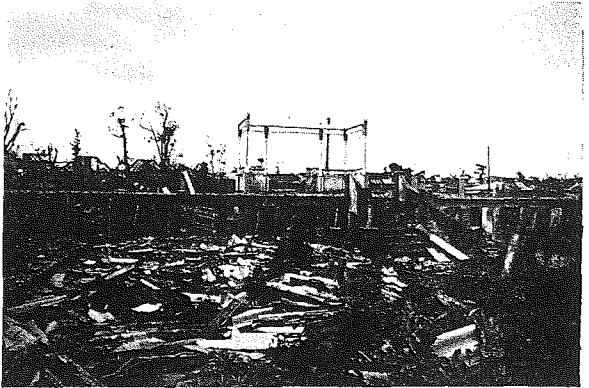
Q: How is the access to the Atlantic Coast?

A: It is difficult to travel from Managua to Bluefields for various reasons—transport is very limited, and the road was destroyed by the hurricane. The trip is now taking 16 hours by bus. It's hard to get a seat, because many people want to go either because they are from there or have relatives or friends there. Because there has been so much destruction, there is nowhere to sleep, and little to eat. You have to take many things with you, so you can go only for a short time.

Q: Can you describe the extent of the destruction?

A: Bluefields was hit by 150 miles per-hour winds, and more than 90% of the town was destroyed. Some of the concrete houses are still standing, but they are very weak. Nearly all the roofs were blown off. Wooden houses were totally destroyed, their posts knocked to the ground. The houses of dirt floors and wooden walls were swept away by the flooding.

In all, 322,000 people had to be evacuated. They were taken from Bluefields to Rama and to Managua. Some stayed, especially in Corn Island, where those who work in the fisheries didn't want to leave their houses, fearing looting. Old people who spent their entire life there didn't want to leave. Rescue missions helped old people, tying ropes to them so that the wind wouldn't blow them away, and helped to evacuate them. Luckily, only 121 people were killed. There was a lot of human solidarity—many young people risked their lives to help others. 182 were wounded, and 119 have disappeared.



Carlos Maibeth

*150-mile-per-hour winds devastated Nicaragua's Atlantic coast.*

Q: How were Indigenous communities affected by the storm?

A: The island of Rama Key was destroyed. But, people have good spirit for the future. My house was destroyed, but we are using what was left in order to construct houses that are smaller.

Agriculture was hardest hit. People grew bananas, rice, beans, sugar cane, and all this was destroyed. In agriculture alone, nearly \$100 million was lost. It was nearing the time of harvest, and all was lost. The exception was sugar cane, but the roads do not allow access to harvest the cane now. Bananas, an important export crop, were totally destroyed.

Another very important effect was the ecological destruction—animals like the jaguars and deer were killed or have disappeared from the region. *Cusuco* (armadillos) and monkeys also died, eliminating other sources of food. Birds also were affected by the trees falling. Lobsters have left for other areas of the ocean. Turtles, which were in danger of becoming extinct, are now nearly gone.

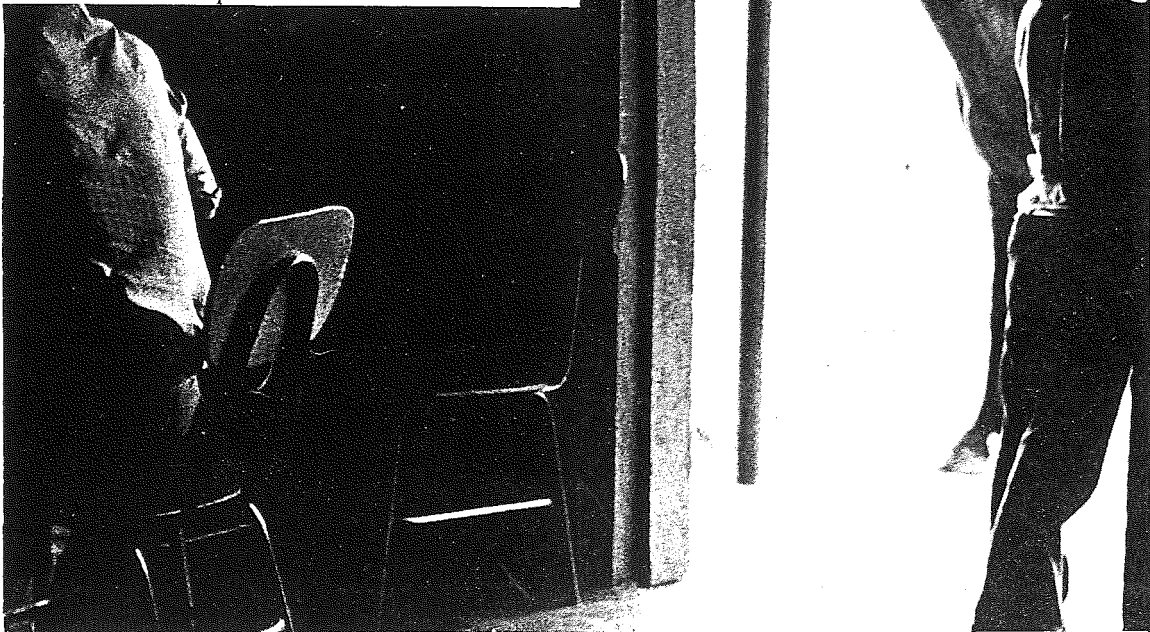
Q: How is the rebuilding going?

A: The government gave each family ten pieces of zinc to rebuild their roofs. Also, one of the first things the government did was to restore electricity with a generator, so that the people could have light to dance and celebrate Christmas.

Q: Is aid from other countries reaching the communities?

A: On the day I was in Bluefields, a boat arrived with supplies from people in the U.S. via Canada—clothes, food, tools, and medicines. Help has come from Europe. Also, a lot of aid from Cuba—powdered milk and medicines, and Cuba offered to re-construct a lot of houses. The U.S. government has refused to help. There is still lack of clothing, and while there is now food for a few months, afterwards there will be a serious shortage of food. Mosquito nets are also needed. Diarrhea is widespread due to contaminated water, so there need to be wells dug and projects to provide good drinking water. Malaria broke out caused by mosquitos breeding in the water.

Technicians are needed to restore power, since material won't help without skilled workers.



**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Provide assistance by sending urgently needed money, materials and technical assistance. Inquiries can be directed and checks may be sent to Quest for Peace/Hurricane Relief, P.O. Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782, or to Nicaragua Hurricane Relief, 1400 Shattuck Ave., Ste. 7-125, Berkeley, CA 94709. (415) 531-0779.