



Photos and
commentary
by Chris Black

CARIBBEAN

LONG A TOURIST SHANGRI LA, THE CARIBBEAN IS RENOWNED FOR ITS TRANQUILLITY, BALMY BEACHES, ELECTRIC BLUE WATERS, AND FRIENDLY PEOPLE. IT IS ALL THAT, OF COURSE – AND MORE. THE REGION IS ALSO HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO NATURAL DISASTERS AND TO POVERTY, TWO INGREDIENTS THAT OFTEN LIE AT THE HEART OF VULNERABILITY. PHOTOGRAPHER CHRIS BLACK VISITED THE AREA AS A VOLUNTEER FOR THE FEDERATION AND HIS PICTURES CAPTURE A SIDE OF THE ISLANDS THAT THE TRAVEL BROCHURES DON'T.

Children of the Caribbean

▲ Happy and safe with his group, eyes turned towards the setting sun and the future, a young volunteer embodies the spirit of the Dominican Red Cross Youth. I spent an afternoon with his brigade from the Invivienda neighbourhood of Santo Domingo as they practised their first-aid and emergency manoeuvres. In them I saw everything that was strong and hopeful about the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



▲ In the area around Cayes, in the south of Haiti, I was amazed by the hard work and dedication of the volunteers despite difficult working conditions. This child is one from among 144 families receiving aid at Simon near Cayes. Volunteers from the local Red Cross distribute corn, sugar, beans and rice donated by the Federation and the French Red Cross.



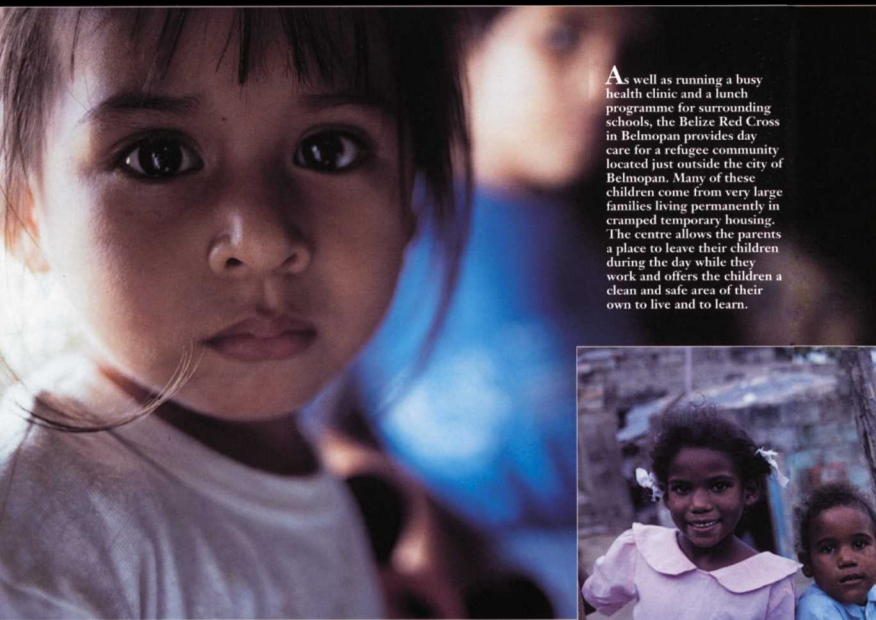
▲ Life is just returning to normal in the town of San Antonio, in the north of Belize, after being badly hit by flooding in October and November 1995. The children pictured here are fishing, gaining life once again from a river that not so long ago had caused so much heartache to their region.



▲ A young girl minds the store for her parents in Douglas, north Belize, near the Mexican border. This village is also getting back on its feet after the severe floods with the help of the Belize Red Cross. When the floods struck, the Red Cross found shelter for many families on higher ground. When the waters receded, it provided cement, food and other aid as the villagers rebuilt their houses and pondered the future of their sugar cane crops.



◀ The people on the island of Montserrat have been living in the shadow of a volcano since it first erupted in July 1995. The tension is usually visible in their faces, but today the children and staff in this special school run by the Montserrat branch of the British Red Cross have set aside their fears and are eagerly engaged in their Christmas preparations.



As well as running a busy health clinic and a lunch programme for surrounding schools, the Belize Red Cross in Belmopan provides day care for a refugee community located just outside the city of Belmopan. Many of these children come from very large families living permanently in cramped temporary housing. The centre allows the parents a place to leave their children during the day while they work and offers the children a clean and safe area of their own to live and to learn.



▶ The Rehabilitation Aids Workshop of the Stella Maris School in Belize City is a hive of activity, as the special needs children happily go about their work. This pupil quietly and proudly has just finished showing me one of his woodworking projects.

Coming home. A group of Haitians repatriated from the Bahamas arrive at Port-au-Prince airport and are met by representatives of the Federation and the Haitian Red Cross. Many had to leave with only the clothes on their backs. In their midst, I spotted these two sisters — pretty in pink and white — staying close to their parents for protection and reassurance.



▶ In one of the poorest districts of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, the Red Cross operates a health care and health education clinic. Outside, two girls watch curiously as I climb to the cliff edge to survey the scene below; right next to the river is a squatter settlement, the first area to be flooded when the water rises.