



ADRA Uruguay administrative headquarters facade in 2018.

Photo courtesy of ADRA Uruguay Archives, accessed on July 8, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Z94A4G>.

ADRA Uruguay

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The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is a global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Presently it is in more than one hundred thirty countries, including Uruguay.¹ ADRA Uruguay headquarters is located on Mateo Vidal St, 3211, Zip Code 11600, in the city and Department of Montevideo, Republic of Uruguay.²

ADRA Uruguay, a branch of ADRA International, is a private, non-governmental and non-profit corporation. This agency is a charitable and philanthropic organization that was established in 1965 with the purpose of “serving humanity so that everyone can live as God wishes.” ADRA Uruguay implements programs that bring benefits to individuals regardless of ethnicity, political affiliation, or religion.³ All its efforts are concentrated to “provide opportunities for people to overcome the poverty and the needs through the following areas: promotion and protection of children and teenagers, attention to family groups of high vulnerability, economic development, emergency response, and risk and disaster reduction.”⁴

In Uruguay, this Agency runs five community-support centers. They are as follows: Centro Juvenil 33 Orientales (33 Eastern Youth Center), located in the Cerro Norte community, in Montevideo; Centro Juvenil La Playa (La Playa Youth Center), located in the Santa Catalina community, in Montevideo; Club de Niños ADRA II (ADRA II Children’s Club), in the Cerro Norte community; Club de niños ADRA III (ADRA III Children’s Club), also in Cerro Norte; and the

Club de Niños Jardín Edén (Jardín Edén Children's Club), in the Cerro Pelado area, Maldonado⁵ Now to fulfill its mission of serving humanity and transforming lives, ADRA Uruguay has 61 employees at its service⁶

Organization

The Seventh-day Adventist Church began its missionary activities in Uruguay at the end of the 19th century. Thanks to evangelistic efforts made during the last decade of that century, on February 1897 a church was established in the city of Nueva Helvecia, located in the southeast region of the Colonia department. This was the first Adventist congregation in the country.⁷ From this beginning, based on Christian values, the Adventist Church has demonstrated a strong vocation of service to the most vulnerable social sectors. In this line of work, around half a century later, the Adventist church in Uruguay created an institution that could deal exclusively with the segment of welfare service⁸

The organizational history of ADRA Uruguay dates back to 1956, when the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists first established an Adventist welfare service. This first Adventist charitable service institution was named "Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service" (SAWS).⁹ The initiative was successful and a few years after its establishment, SAWS, from its headquarters in Washington, D.C., was already sending financial and humanitarian aid to more than twenty countries around the world.¹⁰

Around 1964 the South American Division (SAD), in accordance with the need to organize and assist working in its ecclesiastical territory (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay), made the decision to regulate the operation of an entity corresponding to SAWS. From the first moment, the regulations made by the SAD established clearly the philanthropic and social welfare character of this institution. This was the beginning of the "Obra Filantrópica de Asistencia Social Adventista" (Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service)-- OFASA-- history. Accordingly, one year later, on June 19, 1965, ADRA Uruguay was officially established, with the name of "OFASA."¹¹

When the agency was established, OFASA Uruguay was located on Italia Ave., 2360, in Montevideo.¹² This was the first Adventist institution that was especially dedicated to assistance work in the country. Its statutes were approved by the resolution of the Executive Power on February 29, 1968. In addition, OFASA's name was registered in the Registro de Personas Jurídicas del Ministerio de Educación y Cultura (Ministry of Education and Culture Registry of Legal Persons) with no. 3371, Sheet 1, Book XII.¹³ Since then this agency has assisted in responses to emergencies and disasters, such as great floods that over and over punish the country.¹⁴ The institution has assisted the victims with personal hygiene kits and house cleaning kits, besides other donations such as clothes, mattresses, and food.¹⁵

History

In 1975 OFASA Uruguay administrative headquarters were moved to Mateo Vidal St, 3211, in Montevideo.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the *Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service* continued to grow, reaching more countries. In the 1970s the welfare service became the "Servicio Mundial Adventista" (Welfare-Seventh-day Adventist World Service, Inc). And later, in 1983, SAWS had its name definitively changed to "Agencia Adventista de Desarrollo y Recursos Asistenciales Internacional" (Adventist Development and Relief Agency),¹⁷ that remains to this day. Although the name changed a few times in the early years, the fundamental principles remained the same.¹⁸

Following this change in the nomenclature of the Adventist world welfare service, the other social welfare institutions linked to the Adventist organization around the world also changed their names. Thus, it did not take long for "OFASA" in Uruguay to be changed to "ADRA," as well. In the period of name change, ADRA began to indicate that the organization's goal was also to handle chronic problems such as hunger, poor nutrition, poverty, disease and underdeveloped resources, as well as disaster relief.¹⁹ Some years later, "in 1997, the United Nations granted ADRA International the highest status granted to non-governmental organizations: General Advisory Status. This allowed ADRA to be present on a much broader scale in the international community."²⁰ Thus, it continued its performance, even in countries like Uruguay.

During 2008 the Centro Juvenil 33 Orientales (33 Eastern Youth Center) was inaugurated in the Cerro Norte zone. This was the first project focused on teenagers managed by ADRA Uruguay.²¹ Two years later, on April 2010, the Club de Niños ADRA II (ADRA II Children's Club) was inaugurated in the Cerro Norte community.²² Later, on June 2013, the Club de niños ADRA III (ADRA III Children's Club) came into operation, also in Cerro Norte. In all these centers, actions are carried out to help improve the quality of life of children and teenagers. The goal of ADRA Uruguay with these projects is to help the integral development of the little ones, which includes their social interaction.²³

At the end of 2013, ADRA Uruguay took another step to consolidate its growth. At that time the first director who would provide full-time services to the Charitable Agency was appointed. On entering this new phase, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uruguay sought, through ADRA, "to consolidate the process and further boost growth and diversify lines of work, [as well as] having more presence in the countryside of the country." Thus, the agency was able to carry out its actions faster and with more autonomy.²⁴

In 2014 during the first week of February, torrential rains caused the water level of the Yí River to rise, causing floods in part of the city of Durazno. As a result, ADRA Uruguay took immediate measures by sending volunteers to the region to help victimized families. This action received the support of ADRA International and ADRA South America and brought humanitarian aid to around one and a half thousand people. As well as other actions, ADRA Uruguay distributed personal hygiene kits to families in a refugee center and delivered cleaning kits to disinfect the houses of

the affected population. On that occasion the city mayor recognized the effort made by ADRA volunteers and spoke of the importance of this institution for the city in that difficult time.²⁵

In the following year, a similar problem affected again the inhabitants of that same city. This time the river reached 11 meters and 42 centimeters, damaging 952 houses and displacing more than five thousand four hundred people. Then ADRA Uruguay, in support of the municipal government, distributed 420 useful kits of personal hygiene and kits to disinfect houses. In the same way, another 200 kits, that the Sistema Nacional de Emergencias (National Emergency System) entrusted to ADRA for distribution, were donated to the affected population. So, around two thousand three hundred people were reached. And once again the city mayor made a statement of appreciation for the services provided by ADRA Uruguay.²⁶ In this same year (2015), ADRA Uruguay headquarters were transferred to the new facilities of the Unión Uruguaya (Uruguay Union of Churches Mission) on Agraciada Ave., 3452, in Montevideo.²⁷

Later, within December 2015 and January 2016, the rains caused the Cuareim and Uruguay Rivers to overflow. Due to the tragedy, more than twenty-five thousand people were affected in the areas of Rivera, Artigas, Salto, and Paysandú. This was considered the biggest overflow of these rivers since 1959. Accordingly, to alleviate the suffering of the population, ADRA Uruguay went into action with its team of volunteers. And joining forces with some government entities, the agency distributed 1,923 personal hygiene kits and 1,986 cleaning kits to disinfect houses. As a result of this emergency response, 7,809 people were assisted. Taking into account the funds used and the 180 volunteers who participated in this action, it was considered that this had been the biggest response to an emergency that ADRA Uruguay had undertaken until then.²⁸

The support to cope with emergencies continued in the following years. In April 2016 heavy rains caused other tragedies in many parts of the country, and more than four thousand people were displaced throughout Uruguay. On April 15 of that year, for example, a tornado with bursts of up to two hundred km/h was recorded in the city of Dolores. This event left five victims dead. They also observed that, in Dolores alone, 140 blocks were affected by that natural phenomenon. On that occasion the city downtown was described as “a war zone.”²⁹

In response to this sad reality, ADRA Uruguay, in the first 24 hours of the tornado, deployed a team of field evaluators. And then an initial response was prepared by delivering essential items and construction materials to repair damaged houses. By doing this ADRA Uruguay helped 110 families. Throughout the year of 2016, ADRA Uruguay distributed humanitarian aid that was worth around US \$112,000.³⁰ Still in that year, ADRA Uruguay began the activities of the Centro Juvenil La Playa (La Playa Youth Center), in the Santa Catalina community. Since then the agency uses this project to promote the protection and exercise of the rights of children and teenagers in that place.³¹

From the beginning of its activities, ADRA Uruguay always had to use the SDA administrative headquarters' facilities in the country. However, this situation changed when, with the SAD support and resources, ADRA Uruguay headquarters were inaugurated. March 22, 2018, was the chosen day for the long-awaited inauguration of the headquarters, in a space dedicated exclusively to the institution. Church leaders of the Unión Uruguaya (Uruguay Union of Churches Mission) and the South American Division attended this inaugural event. Since then the agency has been located on the former headquarters of the Misión Uruguaya (Uruguay Mission), presently Uruguay Union of Churches Mission, on Mateo Vidal St, 3211, in Montevideo. The new facility has eight rooms for administrative services, a meeting room, a cafeteria, and a reception. With this new facility, ADRA Uruguay achieved better conditions for planning, evaluating, and executing its projects in general.³²

Regarding the projects most recently, in 2019, the Club de Niños Jardín Edén (Jardín Edén Children's Club) began to operate. This club was established in the Cerro Pelado area, in Maldonado, and has a capacity for up to 50 children. Through this children's club, ADRA Uruguay has also intended to help in the integral development of children. In this and in the other centers already mentioned, the participants, besides having fun with recreational activities, carry out educational activities such as cooking workshops, music, art, and tutoring.³³

Role and Position in the Country

ADRA Uruguay is one of the main humanitarian aid agencies in the country. With presence in almost all regions of Uruguay, this agency has become an important ally of the government and other private institutions in this charitable service. Since its establishment ADRA Uruguay has not only fulfilled its role with the “Plan de Respuesta a Emergencias” (Emergency Response Plan), but over the years has strived to work with diverse projects in prevention of diseases and comprehensive human development.³⁴

Since 2008, for instance, ADRA Uruguay, in partnership with the Instituto del Niño y Adolescente de Uruguay (Uruguayan Institute for Children and Teenagers)--INAU, has implemented projects that serve children, teenagers, and families living in situations of social vulnerability. These projects have supported young people in the process of insertion and reinsertion in formal and non-formal education, in addition to encouraging them to enter the professional world. The agency has also sought to provide qualifications on various topics such as health, rights, and civic duties. All this is done to facilitate the reflection and discussion on fundamental values such as respect, solidarity, and cooperation, among others.³⁵

Another project that ADRA Uruguay participates in is the “Programa Cercanías” (The Neighborhood Program)³⁶ This project is carried out by the “Equipos Territoriales de Atención Familiar” (Territorial Family Care Teams)--ETAF, which perform outreach work with families. The goal of the program is that families obtain “effective access to the social benefits to which they are entitled.” In Montevideo, ADRA Uruguay administers ETAF Cerro and Punta de Rieles

stations, while in Maldonado it works with ETAF Maldonado INAU, ETAF Maldonado, MIDES, and ETAF CAFF. Together, these teams serve around one hundred forty vulnerable families³⁷

The agency also works with projects dedicated to economic development. In this way ADRA Uruguay maintains employment qualification and job reintegration programs. Thus, since 2017, three qualifications in wood carpentry have been offered for imprisoned people and a qualification in woodworking for liberated people. Committed to the promotion of individual and community development, the agency also develops qualifications in gastronomy, pasta making, sanitation, logistics, among others.³⁸

Today ADRA Uruguay continues to work to bring relief to people who are victims of natural disasters. In addition, the agency works through canteens and child cafeterias and Centros Adventistas de Desarrollo de la Comunidad (Adventist Centers of Community Development) scattered throughout the country. As a humanitarian aid institution, ADRA Uruguay works tirelessly to educate children, young people, and adults living in poverty and vulnerability, creating opportunities for them to change for a better life. Under the motto "Justice, Compassion and Love," ADRA Uruguay continues to bring hope to thousands of people in every social action. This way the agency fulfils its important role in the country.³⁹

List of Directors⁴⁰

Period without registration (1965-1987); Ivan N. Samojluk (1988-1991); Eduardo Cayrus (1992); Haroldo Martigani (1993-1995); Oscar Wasiuk (1996, 1997); Leroy Ramos (1998-2000); Homer Salazar (2001); Elbio D. D'Acosta (2002); Gabriel Cesano (2003); Adrián Jiménez (2004-2006); Jorge Horacio Cayrus (2007); Daniel De Brun (2008, 2009); Heriberto Peter (2010, 2011); J. Carlos Sánchez Ruiz (2011-2013); Kevin F. Ivanoff Viera (2013-Present)⁴¹

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