

## **SUNDRY ACTIVITIES**

### **News Items**

#### **The Tracing of Missing Persons in Algeria**

At the beginning of this year the ICRC had accepted a mission at the request of the Algerian and French Governments in joint agreement. This mainly involved the tracing of persons having disappeared in Algeria since the cease-fire on March 19, 1962, and in respect of whom the International Committee had received individual enquiries covering some 1,200 cases.

In agreement with the President, Mr. Ben Bella, Mr. Samuel Gonard, the Vice-President of the ICRC, went to Algiers to prepare the ground for this mission. It had been agreed that the Algerian authorities would facilitate the investigations carried out by the representatives of the International Committee and would grant them complete freedom of movement throughout the territory.

From March to September, some 20 delegates from the ICRC travelled throughout the country, questioning local authorities, police officers, relatives, neighbours and witnesses to the events in which the persons sought had disappeared. They also carried out a systematic investigation in penal establishments.

A bureau set up by the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC in Algiers, sifted the information gathered and this subsequently formed the subject of individual reports to the French authorities, who alone were designated as the proper channel responsible for informing the families concerned.

In most cases, inquiries revealed the person to be dead or that there were serious grounds for presuming death. A few of the missing persons were still alive and were traced.

The ICRC recalled all its delegates at the beginning of September and left to the Algerian Red Crescent the task of settling the few questions which might still arise in connection with these investigations.

#### **Repatriation of Koreans in Japan**

On September 20, October 18 and November 8, 541 Koreans who wished to leave Japan to return to a place of their own choice in their country of origin, left Niigata by sea for the North Korean port of Chong-Jin.

The first of the three vessels was the 110th sailing, with 224 passengers. The 111th carried 217, the 112th, 104, thus bringing the number of persons repatriated under the auspices of the Japanese Red Cross and in the presence of ICRC delegates, to a total of 80,703.

### **The ICRC in Laos**

On November 7, Mr. André Durand, General Delegate of the ICRC in the Far East, left Geneva for South East Asia. He first went to Laos where he was instructed to contact the authorities and the National Red Cross, in order to follow up the various actions undertaken by the ICRC on behalf of victims of the 1961 and 1962 conflicts.

### **Compensation to former POWs**

The Australian Prime Minister announced, at the beginning of November, that former Australian POWs held by the Japanese were to receive an additional payment of £ 16. 10. 0. These amounts were to be paid in part out of Japanese funds previously remitted to Australia by the ICRC for the benefit of former POWs, in accordance with Article 16 of the Peace Treaty with Japan, concluded in San Francisco. Beneficiaries had already received the first payment of £ 86, whereof £ 31 was provided by funds which had been entrusted to the ICRC.

### **At the Central Tracing Agency**

Eighteen years after the end of the Second World War missing civilians still form an important part of the tasks incumbent on the Central Tracing Agency at the headquarters of the ICRC in Geneva. Of the thousands of enquiries which it receives, a great many are sent by persons who were separated from their families either during the war or as a result of events following the war.

Of all the files where, with pathetic similarity, the same story is repeated of some poor child who does not know what became of its family, or of some aged mother anxious to trace her son before departing this life, let us take a look at the case of Grigori Gheorghescu.

When she applied to the Central Agency, his mother could only give very vague information on his presumed whereabouts. Grigori Gheorghescu, who originally came from Rumania, was in Silesia, where he was still living in 1944 with his wife. The couple had apparently been seen by another member of the family at the beginning of 1945 in a train which had stopped in the station at

Heidelberg. This person was himself in another train of evacuees and Mr. Gheorghescu had apparently called out to his relative, from the window of his carriage, that he intended to go to his wife's uncle at Nuremberg.

On the basis of this information, vague and calling for caution, the Central Agency undertook enquiries in several directions in various bureaux in Germany. It seemed at first that nothing would be achieved, as the records of the city of Nuremberg had been partly destroyed during hostilities. Nevertheless, thanks to the co-operation of various enquiry offices, Grigori Gheorghescu was traced to his residence in the Rhineland.

At his request, the Central Agency communicated his address to his mother. She replied: "I cannot find words adequate to express the gratitude of a mother who, through the intervention of the Red Cross, has renewed family ties with the son she had sought in vain for eighteen years".

### **An International Committee's Mission in the Balkans**

In the course of October 1963, Mr. H. G. Beckh, ICRC delegate, went to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania where he was welcomed by the National Societies.

Mr. Beckh was received in *Belgrade* by the leaders of the National Red Cross with whom he had a useful exchange of views on all questions of mutual interest. He then went to Skopje, to the scene of the recent disaster. He contacted the President of the Macedonian Red Cross and visited several of the prefabricated houses offered by various National Societies of the Red Cross and the construction of which will shortly be completed.

The ICRC delegate, accompanied by the President of the Serbian Red Cross was received in Belgrade by the Secretary of State, the head of the State police and the official in charge of the department responsible for the enforcement of Court orders. These senior officials authorised Mr. Beckh to visit penal establishments of his own choosing. He visited those at Sremska, Mitrovica and Rab (on the island of Goli-Otok). He talked freely without witnesses with 23 detainees whom he selected himself and he learnt of the new facilities granted to prisoners.

On the invitation of the Bulgarian Red Cross, the ICRC delegate then proceeded to *Sofia*, where he had the opportunity to review various questions of interest to the National Society and the ICRC. The President, Dr. Kolarov, and his colleagues, expressed their satisfaction with the International Committee's active co-operation in the maintenance of peace during the Cuba incident.

From Sofia, Mr. Beckh went to *Bucharest*. Here again he exchanged viewpoints with the leaders of the Rumanian Red Cross,

## INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

including Mr. Radu, Vice-President, and Mr. Patrasco, Director of External Relations. The ICRC representative was able to observe the active interest of this National Society in various important humanitarian problems demanding the intervention of the Red Cross, inter alia, the uniting of families and the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions.

### **Anniversary**

Geneva has just celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the construction of the Athénée Palace, which was built by the philanthropist J. G. Eynard for the Society of Arts. This anniversary is of interest to the Red Cross for two reasons. Firstly, the Society of Arts, which was founded in the 18th century, today houses on its premises the Geneva Public Welfare Society, of which the Committee of Five was the offspring ; secondly, it was in the Athénée Palace, almost as soon as it was built in 1863, that the first international conference was held, with such decisive results for the ICRC and the Red Cross movement in general.

---