

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

World Red Cross Day in 1968, depending on various events which are planned, such as processions, broadcasts by radio and television, articles in the press, conferences, relief supplies collection and distribution, will demonstrate the activity and ubiquity throughout the world today of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and the Red Lion and Sun.

IN LATIN AMERICA

Three League of Red Cross Societies Seminars

We have already on several occasions brought to the attention of our readers the activities, problems and achievements of the Red Cross in Latin America.¹ In this part of the world the Red Cross is a living reality and every day it seeks the better to fulfil its rôle as an auxiliary to the public authorities and to help those in need, whatever their religion, race or nationality. To achieve this, the National Societies, which already hold regular inter-American Red Cross Conferences, have been encouraged by the League of Red Cross Societies to come together for the purpose of exchanging ideas, comparing experiences and as far as possible standardizing working methods.

To facilitate meetings, the continent has been divided into four sectors: North and Central America; Northern South America; Southern South America; Caribbean. For the first three regions, the League convened and sponsored three seminars which were recently held, the first in Guatemala, the second in Caracas and the third in Buenos Aires. Each time the Red Cross in the host country extended a warm welcome to each guest.²

¹ e.g. *International Review*, April 1965.

² The author of this article represented the League of Red Cross Societies at these three seminars. (*Ed.*)

Guatemala. — The first of these meetings, attended by National Societies from Canada, USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, was held from November 15-18, 1967. The opening speech was by the President of the Republic of Guatemala. More than one hundred delegates took part in the work as representatives of the National Societies concerned.

Most of the recommendations adopted were of a technical order and concerned the standardization of methods and equipment in first-aid, so that combined operations by several National Societies would be more effective. Two recommendations particularly are worthy of note; one concerns the organization of a seminar for disaster relief technicians, the other the setting up of a body of specialists in mass communication, fund collecting and public relations, from the National Societies. These two seminars are expected to be held in Guatemala in March 1968. There is no need to stress the importance of these two forthcoming meetings for Central American countries, which are often the victims of earthquakes, volcanoes, etc., so that the National Societies must constantly be prepared and make plans for action in the event of disaster. It is also useful for them to make their principles and their work as well known as possible.

Attention must also be drawn to another two of the seminar's 62 recommendations. They concern the necessary intervention of the Red Cross during internal disorders. Humanitarian, and based on the Geneva Conventions, these recommendations are undoubtedly important. For that reason we quote them hereunder:

The Third meeting of Presidents and Technical Seminar of Red Cross Societies of the United States, Mexico, Central America and Panama, recommends:

10. — *that National Societies report to their respective governments about the resolutions of a humanitarian nature that have been adopted by the International Red Cross and for assurance that they (the governments) will do everything in their power to implement such resolutions in case of internal strife;*

11. — *that National Societies appeal to their respective governments for utmost assistance in the performance of their humanitarian work*

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in behalf of the victims of internal conflicts, in accordance with extant international agreements.

Caracas. — From November 20-25, 1967, The Venezuelan Red Cross was host to the Second Meeting of Presidents and Technical Personnel of the Northern South American National Societies. Delegations attended from National Societies in: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, whilst the American Red Cross and the Dutch Red Cross West Indies Committee sent observers. Another seminar was taking place simultaneously at Caracas; this—the first of such meetings—was of South American National Society “ Health in the Home ” instructors. Its conclusions and recommendations were submitted to the meeting of Presidents, which approved them in plenary session.

Without going into the details of the recommendations adopted we would mention that which requests National Societies to endeavour to give courses on accident prevention and first-aid in factories and large undertakings, and to set up in such establishments permanent Red Cross teams as a contribution to the safety of the workers and in order to induce the various social strata of the population to take greater interest in and participate more actively in our movement. This might be an interesting and useful Red Cross contribution to the necessary general effort towards social progress and we think it appropriate to give below the text of this recommendation:

“ The IIInd Meeting of Presidents and Technical Personnel from the National Societies of the Northern Region of South America :

10 — The Red Cross in Industry

recommends that the participating National Societies endeavour to conduct courses on accident prevention, first-aid and hygiene in major factories, industries, etc., for the two-fold purpose of contributing to the safety of the workers and to establish permanent Red Cross groups at the industrial concerns where the courses are conducted.

11 — Legal Assistance

recommends that, following the example of the Venezuelan Red Cross, the participating Societies proceed to create a Legal Assistance Service if they feel this is needed.

Some idea of Red Cross vitality in Latin America will be realised when we recall that Caracas was severely damaged during a violent earthquake in July 1967. The National Society's headquarters were particularly hard hit, although this did not prevent the Society from organizing the meeting as arranged, on its own premises.

Buenos Aires. — A third seminar was attended by National Societies from Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil, as well as by observers of the American Red Cross. This took place from December 4—10, 1967. In addition many members of local and provincial committees of the Argentine Red Cross came to the capital for the meeting, sometimes after covering very great distances. They thus displayed their interest for the work of the Red Cross and their desire to improve their knowledge and develop their activities.

In the course of the meeting, various problems such as disaster relief, blood transfusion, Red Cross Youth, nursing care, etc., were examined. One of the topics considered seems worthy of special attention and for that reason we give below the text of the relevant recommendation.

Indeed, although community organization and development (to assist the shanty-town populations on the outskirts of large cities) is the responsibility of governments, the Red Cross can play its part in teaching the rules of pre- and post-natal hygiene by setting up clinics, nurseries and other hygiene and social centres:

Community organization and development

Recommendation No. 1: *The second regional Conference of the National Red Cross Societies, meeting in Buenos Aires, in order to co-ordinate, stimulate and carry through community development programmes, recommends:*

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2. — *that co-operation be sought through general action on the part of the community so that everyone contributes to the progress and*

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welfare of the country through the effort of each individual and mutual assistance ;

3. — that the methods of social service concerning community organization be used to that end ;

4. — that following a survey of needs and problems in a given area, plans be made to direct problems concerning education, health, sanitation, work, recreation, economy, interests and ideals, and then to establish minimum and maximum plans ;

5. — that, on the basis of statistics, health education and sanitation, higher living standards of the family be fostered by providing the communities with all primary services, such as medical, sanitary, preventive and social, which will make for better development ;

6. — that every effort be made to plan the organization on a nationwide basis, which will work from the periphery to the centre and thus will facilitate an increase of team effort and material and technical assistance, because development is not only an organizational process but an educational evolution as well ;

7. — that the structure be planned on a local or community basis, creating solidarity, faith in one's resources, serving without discrimination and teaching the value of one's own personality.

The Caribbean. — Our readers will no doubt be wondering what progress is being made by the Caribbean National Societies which have not so far been mentioned here. From June 22-30, 1968, these Societies will hold a seminar on pre-disaster planning. This useful meeting will take place in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad-and-Tobago. The hurricanes which periodically devastate the countries of this region are a major problem for National Societies. These disasters require them to be always ready for anything, through special preparation and training of technicians to assume responsibility in operation, when disaster strikes and the emergency relief teams go into action. This is the task facing the Port-of-Spain Seminar which will be a new experience in Latin America.

Conclusion. — To illustrate these few impressions of National Red Cross Society activity in Latin America, and perhaps also to

show the importance of contact among neighbouring National Societies, a practical example might be appropriate.

On November 25, after the meeting at Caracas in the Venezuelan Red Cross headquarters, the President of that Society went to the airport to bid farewell to the Colombian Red Cross delegation. When he arrived the loud-speakers were calling him to go to the manager's office; a few moments later we received the sad news that at Chiquinquirá, Boyacá (Colombia), a case of mass poisoning had caused 70 deaths and hospitalization of more than 500 people in a condition varying from the most serious to the mild. An amateur radio enthusiast, on behalf of the Colombian Red Cross, was requesting urgent despatch of an antidote as local stocks were spent.

As soon as the appeal was heard the Venezuelan Red Cross went into action. It called in the Minister of Health, the military and civilian hospital directors, and others; in a word all who might help to find the necessary medicine. A Caracas pharmacy opened its shop to make available its stock of antidote. In addition, at the request of the Venezuelan Red Cross, the Caracas/Bogotá flight was delayed to allow as much antidote as possible to be loaded aboard the aeroplane. As the Colombian Red Cross delegation was travelling in the same aircraft they were able to make radio contact with Chiquinquirá and Bogotá to announce their arrival in the capital, so that arrangements were made for the immediate transport of the medical supplies to the victims.

What better example of National Society co-operation? We can state that the Red Cross in Latin America is alive and constantly demonstrating its efficiency.

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