

ON BEHALF OF THE VICTIMS IN INDIA

The serious situation in which India finds herself from a food point of view is known. The Indian Red Cross is participating in the aid which is being organized and the League of Red Cross Societies sent out the following appeal on February 22, 1966, to National Societies :

The Indian Red Cross has informed its Government that, as part of the co-ordinated national plan to relieve the serious situation caused by the present food shortage, the Red Cross will provide supplementary feeding to children and expectant and nursing mothers—the most vulnerable group. It has asked the League to solicit the assistance of sister Societies in the provision of milk powder, other protein-rich foods in powder or extract form, baby foods and multi-vitamins.

At a meeting held in New Delhi on the 8th February, convened by the Director General of FAO, the Indian Minister for Food and Agriculture reported that it was anticipated that the crops planted last summer for harvesting in the autumn would be approximately 10 million tons below normal, while the crops planted in the autumn for harvesting in the spring would be 2 to 3 million tons short. The USA and other governments had promised substantial help, but additional assistance was necessary. The areas most severely affected by the drought are the States of Andhra, Gujarat, Mysore, Mabarashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa—in these States, the crop failure has been more than 75 %. Out of a total population of 100 million, 15 to 20 million children up to the age of 14 and 2.5 million expectant and nursing mothers would be affected. To supplement the minimum food rations, it is proposed to operate milk stations for this group. Of the estimated 130,000 tons of milk powder which would be required, so far only about 43,000 tons had been announced or promised.

Major-General C. K. Lakshmanan, Secretary General of the Indian Red Cross, who represented the League at this meeting as

an observer, explained that, while the contribution of the Indian Red Cross may not be large in relation to the total need, their 260 Branches in the affected areas would actively participate in setting up milk distribution centres. Further relief centres could be established in the Red Cross Maternity and Child Welfare Centres and also at numerous schools in which the Counsellors and Junior Red Cross members would participate. The Indian Red Cross has over four million Junior Red Cross members and it proposes to mobilize the older members to help carry out this programme.

It is known that a number of appeals on behalf of the famine victims in India have already been made and we are convinced that National Societies will be pleased to be able to participate in this purely Red Cross activity. Gifts of milk powder, other protein-rich foods in powder or extract form, baby foods and multi-vitamin tablets should be sent by air to the Indian Red Cross, New Delhi, or sent by sea via the port of Bombay. If preferred, gifts in cash can be sent to the League in Geneva.

As this programme is largely for children and will be operated in part by the Juniors of the Indian Red Cross, it is believed that the Juniors of other National Societies will wish to participate in this relief action which must inevitably be of rather long duration.

With the arrival of the first supplies from sister Societies on the 4th March, the Indian Red Cross Society has advised that their supplementary feeding programme, for which the League appealed in its circular of the 22nd February, will continue for some months while the difficult food situation lasts.

This message was in response to the League's enquiries as to the actual intentions of the Indian Red Cross and the real needs, as, since the Red Cross programme was announced, there has been a great deal of conflicting information published in the press concerning the food shortages throughout large areas of India. Following the severe drought which affected most of the country last year, millions of tons of food must be imported into India if a serious situation of starvation, sickness and eventually death is to be avoided. Already enormous shipments of cereals are on their way, but it is important that supplementary feeding programmes, such as the Red Cross, providing extra proteins and vitamins, be carried out on a wide scale

and for many months to ensure that the present serious situation does not deteriorate into a nation-wide disaster. Mr. B. R. Sen, the Director General of FAO said in Rome on the 7th March, on his return from India, that the months of May-June-July would be the most critical period...

Many National Societies have informed the League of their interest in helping the Indian Red Cross carry out this programme. By March 31, 1966, National Societies of the following countries had made contributions: Algeria, Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, Luxemburg, Monaco, New Zealand, Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

We might add that, by the end of March, with the purchases made by the League and the shipments from National Societies, 900 tons of powdered milk was on the way to the Indian Red Cross.

Cambodia

The membership of the Cambodian Red Cross is increasing constantly. It is twelve thousand strong and there are local committees in 19 provinces and municipalities throughout the Kingdom.

People from all walks of life give their generous support. This has enabled the Society to build a large dispensary which has been in operation for three years, staffed by technical personnel, such as doctors, nurses and midwives. It is owned partly by the Red Cross and partly by the Government.

Here are some of the tasks performed by the National Society since 1957¹:

¹ These details are taken from a report prepared by the National Society for submission to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross; it is signed by Mr. Pheng Kanthel, First Vice-President of the Cambodian Red Cross.