

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The ICRC and the War in the Near East

GENERAL REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

When the war broke out on June 5, 1967, in the Near East, the International Committee of the Red Cross had already taken precautions by delegating representatives to Cairo, Tel Aviv, Beyrouth, Damascus and Amman.

From the outset, the ICRC sent all States involved in the conflict an appeal to take steps to ensure the implementation of the Geneva Conventions. It reminded those Governments that these Conventions laid down that wounded, sick, prisoners of war and civilians should be protected and treated humanely and that respect should be shown for hospitals, ambulances and medical establishments. The Committee issued the reminder that it was prepared to undertake all the tasks assigned to it by the Conventions, and take any humanitarian initiative required, and that the Central Information Agency for prisoners of war and civilians had been set up and was already operative in Geneva.

The Committee also requested the Governments to convey to it full details on the military prisoners taken by the Armed Forces and on enemy civilians arrested or interned. It also pointed out that its delegations in the belligerent countries had been assigned to organize, with the co-operation of the authorities and National Societies, practical assistance to all victims of the conflict without distinction. Concomitantly with this appeal to the Governments,

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the Committee chartered an aircraft which it had painted white with the red cross sign. This took off from Geneva no more than three days after the start of hostilities, conveying seven further delegates to reinforce their colleagues already on the spot and carrying also almost ten tons of relief supplies, medical equipment and blood plasma¹.

By June 23, there were some thirty delegates in the countries directly concerned, namely Israel, the United Arab Republic, the Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. These delegates were doctors, specialists in emergency relief programs or in tracing missing persons and handling family enquiries.

The ICRC operates from two bases, one in Nicosia—from where, at least at the beginning of the conflict, the various capitals could be reached most rapidly—and the other in Beyrouth, the latter being geared more particularly to deal with relief programs.

This action in the Near East is of course being carried out in conformity with the Geneva Conventions to which all the countries involved are party.

We shall see what were the International Committee's main objectives by considering in turn the various categories of victims it had to take care of.

Wounded. — At the beginning, of course, emergency action had to be taken for the benefit of all the wounded. It took the form, first and foremost, of large consignments by special aircraft, of blood plasma, dressing material and surgical equipment. Several National Societies have also sent medical personnel.

Following the cessation of hostilities, this work was taken over by the various national health services and the ICRC no longer had to participate.

Prisoners of war. — All prisoners have been visited by ICRC representatives, some of them twice.

A census of prisoners is in progress and Geneva has already received and transmitted to the countries of origin lists of names

¹ *Plate.* Already on June 8 the ICRC aircraft took off with emergency supplies for the Near East.

with the necessary details; these lists, according to the Geneva Conventions, are to be supplied to the Government of the country of origin by the Detaining Power.

Immediate attention was given by the ICRC delegates on the spot to the seriously wounded prisoners. A large number of these have already been repatriated, mostly from Israel to Egypt or Jordan, and this work will be resumed later as some of the wounded are in no condition to be moved¹.

According to the Geneva Conventions, prisoners of war should be repatriated on the cessation of hostilities. Negotiations are proceeding to obtain the co-operation of all the States concerned with a view to general repatriation of all prisoners irrespective of rank or the number held by one party or the other.

Rescue operations in the Sinai Desert. — A large number of Egyptian soldiers were in dire straits in the Sinai Desert after the cease-fire. The ICRC delegates were active in the rescue operations, responsibility for which was assumed first and foremost by the Israeli authorities. These operations were made difficult by the fact that the territory was enormous and that many of the soldiers were widely dispersed. They had often to be sought by helicopter, sometimes one by one, and supplies had to be taken to them by tank-lorries. Some 12,000 troops were enabled to return to their home country. The conveyance of isolated troops towards the eastern bank of the Suez Canal and then to the other side was continued until, by the end of June, the operation was nearing completion².

Refugees. — The refugee problem is critical. There are of course the refugees from the 1948 war who are looked after by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). This specialized agency is still responsible for the welfare of these refugees, whether they be the original refugees or newcomers. So far the Red Cross aim was to supplement the work

¹ *Plate.* Exchange of wounded Israeli and Jordanian POW's under ICRC control.

² *Plate.* ICRC delegates about to make another sweep over the Sinai desert.

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done by UNWRA by providing additional emergency supplies where the situation was most critical, particularly in Jordan and Syria. This work will be continued and will later be taken over by the League of Red Cross Societies under an agreement between the two institutions.

On June 16, this mission was described to National Societies as follows:

The growing number of civilian refugees and displaced persons, following the conflict in the Near East, and the need to organise on their behalf an efficient and harmonious Red Cross relief action, have created such problems that the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies have agreed to combine their efforts, in close collaboration with the National Societies concerned and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA).

As in the past, the ICRC will continue to play its rôle of neutral intermediary on behalf of the victims of the events (wounded, prisoners of war, internees, civilian population of occupied areas) and to ensure the strict application of the Geneva Conventions in all the countries affected by the conflict.

The ICRC will continue to aid the refugees and displaced persons in the occupied territories, while the League will take charge in the regions where the refugees are under the control of their governments.

Relief supplies. — The ICRC's immediate concern was to assist the victims. On June 7, a chartered plane bearing the sign of the red cross delivered six tons of supplies. Other planes followed, and on June 14, the International Committee sent a general appeal to Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Lion and Sun Societies. This read:

“ Some fifteen tons of relief supplies have been despatched and distributed with the help of the National Societies. Each one of these war-torn countries has received a share of the donations sent to the ICRC by the National Societies of Canada, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lybia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, or provided by the ICRC itself and various charitable organizations. The distribution was made in accordance with the donors' wishes.

. . . From hour to hour details are coming in of the enormous needs, particularly in the areas directly affected by the fighting, where the ICRC is working to provide emergency relief.

Attached to this appeal is a list of National Society requirements. The ICRC is now awaiting details of the medical personnel needed: as soon as these are known they will be communicated to National Societies.

Inquiries and generous offers have been received from many National Societies to which the ICRC makes a 'pressing appeal, so that it may cope with all the widespread distress.'

Subsequently, the ICRC was able to give details of National Societies' medico-surgical requirements in Iraq, Jordan, the Lebanon, the United Arab Republic and Syria, and it brought attention to the Jordan Red Crescent Society's announcement that the civilian refugees were in urgent need of assistance¹.

The over-all relief program is being developed as the following figures show:²

a) Relief supplies flown out by six planes chartered by the ICRC included various foodstuffs, medical supplies, blood plasma, dressing material, blankets, clothing, tents, etc., weighing in all more than 45 tons, and valued at more than 700,000 Swiss francs.

b) A further plane on loan from the French Government, now based on Nicosia, took off for Beyrouth on June 21, loaded with emergency relief supplies.

c) Cash donations for the benefit of the victims of the war have also been received in Geneva. They came from many Governments and National Societies (particularly Denmark, Great Britain and Switzerland) and towards the end of June had reached a total of more than 1,900,000 Swiss francs.

d) In addition, relief in kind has been forwarded direct to Amman, Beyrouth, Cairo and Damascus by National Societies in many countries; the value of these consignments exceeded 3,100,000 Sw.frs.

¹ *Plate.* Milk supplied by ICRC being distributed to refugees in Amman.

² Figures as at June 23, 1967.

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Civilians.—The ICRC was unable to assess immediately the full impact on the population in the territories occupied by the Israeli Forces. Its delegations in these territories will now do so, but the Israeli Government has already declared itself capable of coping with the situation.

The International Committee will certainly give what help is required in this connection. New delegations will be based in the regions of Gaza, West Jordan, Southern Syria; there are delegates already installed in Jerusalem with the agreement of the Israeli authorities.

One of the immediate tasks is communication of family messages and the tracing of civilians who have been dispersed. Delegates have already been able to arrange for transmission of more than 45,000 family messages on behalf of civilians¹. All have not yet reached the persons for whom they are intended, for many families have been up-rooted and the operation will take time.

Civilians must be traced and restored to their families². This work has already begun; a number of children have been conveyed from West to East of the River Jordan and delivered to their parents.

By the end of June the International Committee's campaign was in full swing. Its first objective was to ensure implementation of the Geneva Conventions which, it may be said, have in general been respected. The Committee also aims to repatriate prisoners of war, to the very last man, re-group dispersed families and, in a word, aid civilians wherever necessary.

SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The foregoing account of the humanitarian action in the Near East may be supplemented by details of the day-to-day development.

¹ *Plate.* ICRC delegates crossing the Jordan, taking thousands of civilian messages.

² *Plate.* Arab civilians cross the other way.

June 7, 1967.—The ICRC chartered an aeroplane which took off from Geneva airport for the Near East with five delegates and six tons of relief supplies.

June 9.—The five ICRC delegates who flew from Geneva to Bevrouth on the night of June 7-8 in a Red Cross plane with 6 tons of relief supplies are endeavouring to assess the most urgent needs in the five countries directly involved in the conflict.

Relief supplies so far sent by the ICRC include dressing material, blood plasma, surgical kits and instruments, milk for babies and various medicaments donated by the ICRC, the National Societies of Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and Tunisia as well as by Caritas and various other donors.

The Finnish Red Cross has sent a consignment of blood albumin direct to Nicosia, where the ICRC has laid in stocks.

Donations and many offers of blood plasma continue to reach Geneva. The Danish Red Cross and Government have each sent the ICRC 100,000 Kr. In addition the Norwegian Red Cross has advised remittance of 50,000 N.Kr. whilst a donation from the Red Cross of the Federal Republic of Germany was received in Geneva last night.

Information from the delegates will be relayed rapidly to National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, many of which have declared themselves ready to send relief supplies.

June 11.—The ICRC aircraft which left Geneva on June 7 returned on June 10 and took off again with 8 tons of relief supplies for Egypt, Jordan and Syria. This consignment consisted of medical supplies for emergency treatment, such as blood plasma, surgical instruments, mobile X ray units, bandaging material, blankets, antibiotics, cortisone, glucose, etc.

June 12.—The Central Tracing Agency in Geneva receives the first lists of prisoners of war; they contain the names of 335 Egyptians and 385 Jordanians.

The Government of the U.A.R. sent a list of 9 Israeli pilots captured by the Egyptian Forces.

June 13.—The ICRC delegate in Israel visited 3,000 Egyptian prisoners of war in the old camp at Atlich. He was given every facility to enable him to visit these prisoners as soon as possible.

June 14.—The plight of Egyptian stragglers in the Sinai Desert is the ICRC's main concern. Although its delegates in Tel Aviv have been prevented so far, for reasons beyond their control, from going to the scene themselves, they have already taken up the matter with the

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Israeli authorities who agreed to issue orders to the Israeli troops to give every possible assistance to all wounded Egyptian soldiers and those who have laid down their arms.

At the ICRC's request, the water pipeline from Ismailia to Sinai was opened again last night.

The ICRC intends to use for immediate relief work in Sinai, a donation of 250,000 francs from the Swiss Government. Instructions to this effect were given immediately to its delegates on the spot.

The ICRC delegates in the Near East are tackling many large-scale humanitarian problems in territory where communications are extremely difficult. In Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Israel and the Lebanon, they are co-operating closely with the National Societies, with the Magen David Adom and with local authorities, for the despatch and distribution of emergency relief supplies and for the strict application of the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC has already received lists of prisoners of war from Israel and Egypt. Its delegates have visited prison camps and are enquiring into the needs of the population in various areas affected by the conflict.

The first seriously wounded Egyptian and Jordanian prisoners are scheduled for repatriation tomorrow. They will be conveyed in the ICRC's aircraft. Arrangements for the repatriation of able-bodied prisoners are being studied.

The ICRC continues to transmit family messages between countries separated by the war.

June 15.—At present there are three ICRC delegates in the Sinai region co-operating in the rescue of Egyptian soldiers still in the desert.

They are undertaking this mission following an agreement between the ICRC and the Israeli Government with a view to tackling promptly the humanitarian problem arising from the plight of Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai Desert.

The ICRC has been informed by its delegates in Tel Aviv that in the last few days 500 wounded have been rescued from the desert and are now receiving care.

Yesterday an ICRC delegate to Cairo contacted the Israeli military authorities East of the Suez canal. He crossed the Sinai Desert in an Israeli army vehicle and joined up with the ICRC delegation in Tel Aviv.

June 16.—In order to size up the situation and assist in necessary emergency measures, the ICRC delegates have been flying repeatedly over the Sinai by helicopter at low altitude since June 14; they landed a number of times.

They have observed that in the past 48 hours the situation of the civilian population and Egyptian forces has improved. Operations undertaken by the authorities indicate that Egyptian troops who have not yet been aided will be regrouped and given nourishment within the next few hours.

The delegation is taking part in all operations carried out by the Israeli armed forces in lorries, helicopters, and aeroplanes in order to collect, supply and care for Egyptians still in the desert. Every available method is being employed to bring the relief operation in Sinai to a successful conclusion.

The ICRC delegates emphasize that this is an extremely difficult task. It often involves searching for groups or individuals dispersed over a desert four times larger than Switzerland.

June 17.—The essential phase of the regrouping operation of Egyptian troops withdrawing from East to West and who are not considered by the Israelis as prisoners of war has practically come to an end on the main East-West lines of march in Sinai. This operation has been carried out by the Israeli army in co-operation with the delegates of the ICRC.

In the vast Sinai peninsula in which only Bedouins live and where communications are most infrequent, it cannot be excluded that some Egyptian troops have not yet been found by the Israeli army. The latter has therefore decided to continue searches by all methods at its disposal to find Egyptian soldiers who have not yet reached the Suez canal zone. It is probable that this only applies to a relatively low number of men. They will receive every assistance from the Israeli army in co-operation with the ICRC delegates. The latter will continue to make sweeps by helicopter over Sinai for that purpose.

So far, 11,000 Egyptian troops who were temporarily in the hands of the Israeli forces have been authorized to proceed to Egypt across the Suez canal. They have been collected in a transit camp in the canal zone which they have been able to cross to their own country in craft, by agreement between the local Egyptian and Israeli commanders.

June 18.—The ICRC delegates have contributed to arrangements for the repatriation of severely wounded prisoners taken by the Israeli forces. On June 15, the ICRC aircraft conveyed the first twenty Egyptians from Israel to Cairo. A further thirty Egyptian prisoners were repatriated the following day. Repatriation of Jordanian wounded prisoners will be by road; they will be accompanied by ICRC delegates.

June 19.—ICRC delegates in the Near East are continuing to arrange repatriation of seriously wounded prisoners. Yesterday, the

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ICRC plane landed at Mafrak airport, near Amman, with nineteen wounded Jordanian troops.

His Majesty King Hussein made a point of welcoming personally these wounded soldiers and the ICRC escort. His Majesty went aboard the Red Cross aircraft to encourage the wounded repatriates.

Two consignments of blankets are scheduled to be sent to Amman today. On June 20 the aircraft will convey a fourth group of wounded Egyptian prisoners to Cairo. On June 12, the ICRC will repatriate from Tel Aviv a second group of Jordanian wounded prisoners and a group of children.

ICRC delegates on the spot are exerting every effort to arrange repatriation of the greatest possible number of wounded.

The ICRC is continuing its intensive action for the benefit of refugees and displaced persons in territory occupied by the Israeli forces. In addition, one of the ICRC delegates has been assigned the task of distributing relief supplies to civilians who have sought refuge in Damascus and to the South of the Syrian capital.

June 22.—The ICRC has taken steps to reinforce its delegations in the Near-East. Today, the aircraft "Nord 262", placed at its disposal through the French Red Cross, left Geneva for Nicosia with ten delegates belonging to its "Group for International Missions". Two other members of that group left Geneva on June 20.

These new reinforcements, which comprise two doctors, supply, transport and radio experts, will be distributed amongst the ICRC delegations already on the spot.

The delegate general of the ICRC in the Near East has already decided to place two delegates to the West of the Suez canal to ensure rapid liaison in the relief of the wounded on the other bank.

Yesterday, the ICRC aircraft arrived in Cairo with 28 wounded Egyptians repatriated from Israel.

June 26.—The delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross have been given permission by the Israeli Government to go anywhere in the territory controlled by Israel.

On the basis of this agreement, the ICRC intends to set up several sub-delegations in these territories.

June 27.—425 Jordanian troops, including 17 officers captured by the Israelis, returned under the auspices of the ICRC to their own country today. Amongst them were three Iraqi civilians released by the Israeli authorities. About twenty-five wounded Jordanian prisoners at present unable to be moved will be taken to Amman as soon as their condition permits.

Preceded by a truck with Red Cross markings a convoy of 18 vehicles has crossed the Jordan from West to East near the Allenby bridge.

This repatriation operation affecting all Jordanian prisoners of war in Israel is the result of an agreement concluded between ICRC delegates in Tel Aviv and Amman.

In accordance with this agreement Jordan has handed over, through the ICRC, two Israeli pilots taken prisoner by the Jordan forces.

The International Committee has also been able to arrange the return to Jordan of children separated from their families. Thirty of these children were thus transported on June 22 from Tel Aviv to Amman to rejoin their families.

In order to meet the deadline for publication, this report goes up to the end of June, but the ICRC' activity is being kept up in all the countries where there are victims of the conflict. Our account of this work will be continued in our next issue.