

ICRC ACTIVITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN 1972

During the year 1972, the ICRC continued in Israel, the occupied territories and the Arab countries to give assistance to persons protected under the terms of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. This assistance consisted essentially in visiting military and civilian prisoners, transmitting family messages, organizing the reuniting of dispersed families and providing relief supplies to the needy population.

Visits to military and civilian prisoners

The prisoners of war detained in Israel, the Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria were visited on the average twice a month. All the prisoners were able to talk in private with the delegates and correspond regularly with their families, from whom they also received parcels.

In Israel, the Egyptian prisoners of war, who numbered 61 until 27 December when three were repatriated, received more than 8,300 letters and 700 parcels in 1972; they wrote about 8,000 letters to their families. The 46 Syrian prisoners of war received some 500 parcels and 3,000 letters and dispatched 4,000 letters. The ten Lebanese prisoners of war captured in June and September 1972 exchanged about 550 letters with their families.

In the Arab countries, the 10 Israeli prisoners of war in the Arab Republic of Egypt received more than 400 parcels and received from and sent to their families some 1,300 letters. In Syria, 100 parcels were handed to the three Israeli prisoners of war, who exchanged about 600 letters with their kin.

Several release and repatriation operations occurred in 1972: one Jordanian and three Egyptian prisoners of war returned to their homes and four Israeli civilians were released by the Jordanian authorities which had granted them prisoner-of-war status.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

In the Israeli-occupied territories, delegates visited about 2,600 Arab civilians detained in eight prisons in Israel and six in occupied territory. In five series of visits, they went to these prisons every two months in Israel and every month in occupied territory.

Each month the delegates distributed parcels of foodstuffs to detainees who had received no visits from their families for more than three months. In the course of the year, more than 7,000 such parcels were distributed in ten prisons. In addition, the ICRC provided various articles such as spectacles, false teeth, books, school material and so forth.

The provision of bus transport also continued for relatives of detainees who could not afford the fare to visit the prisons; 1,100 buses and 27 taxis conveyed on an average 3,500 people a month under the scheme in 1972.

Under ICRC auspices, nine Jordanians, seven Lebanese, one Syrian and one Iraqi civilian internees were repatriated.

Reuniting of dispersed families

Six operations of this kind took place across the Suez Canal; 523 persons joined their kin in the Arab Republic of Egypt, and, going in the other direction, 400 returned to their families in occupied territory. In Syria, 36 persons returned to the Golan Heights. The ICRC also attended to the reuniting of dispersed families in other Arab countries. In the occupied territory of the West Bank of the Jordan, the ICRC acts only for hardship cases where families have not been able to reunite under the normal procedure.

Student travel

To enable young Palestinians living in Gaza to go to Arab universities, the ICRC, since 1970, has been making arrangements for them to travel to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Lebanon and Syria. In 1972, 47 students went to Beirut and 175 to Syria; from the latter country, 31 returned to Gaza during the year.

For Palestinians studying in Cairo, nine crossings of the Suez Canal were organized. In July, 1,652 students crossed from west to east to return to Gaza for their summer holidays; three months later, 1,601 returned to Cairo together with 779 new students.

Assistance to the homeless after destruction of their dwellings

To families in the occupied territories whose dwellings had been destroyed by the Israeli army, the ICRC, co-operating with Israeli Social Welfare, distributed primary necessities: 46 tents and 417 blankets were given to the victims, mainly in the Gaza region.

Family messages

The family messages forwarded for civilians numbered approximately 98,000: 52,200 messages were sent to the occupied territories and 45,700 to the Arab countries. Messages for people in the occupied territories came mostly from Jordan (24,900), the Arab Republic of Egypt (18,000), Syria (7,300), Lebanon (1,300), and other Arab countries (730). In the other direction, messages to people in the Arab countries were as follows: 17,400 to Jordan, 12,800 to the Arab Republic of Egypt, 9,200 to Syria, 2,300 to the Lebanon and 4,000 to other Arab States.

The tracing of missing persons

Over the years, requests to trace civilians and military personnel missing during and after the 1967 conflict have been diminishing. Eight requests concerning military personnel reached the ICRC delegation in Israel; it was able to reply to each request. For the 153 enquiries it received about civilians, it gave 142 replies.
