

The International Committee's Action in the Middle East

At the outset of hostilities in the Middle East, the ICRC took various steps in Geneva and through its delegation in the field.

First of all, the ICRC reminded the Governments involved in the conflict of their obligations under the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. Further, the ICRC stated that it was prepared to offer its services in any activities that required a neutral intermediary. The activities entail, in particular, the tracing of prisoners of war and civilians, visiting prisoners of war and making arrangements for their repatriation. The ICRC was assured by all parties that they would implement the Geneva Conventions and aid the ICRC in its traditional duties.

Concomitantly steps were taken at ICRC headquarters in Geneva to face any emergency. The number of delegates in the field was increased and relief arrangements made for victims of the conflict.

Appeals to belligerents

On 9 October 1973, the ICRC issued the following appeal on behalf of civilians to the parties to the conflict:

The International Committee of the Red Cross is extremely concerned at the extent of the new outbreak of violence in the Middle East and especially at its effects in densely populated areas. This tragic turn of events, confirmed by reliable sources and by the protests which it has received from various parties to the conflict, has led the ICRC to repeat its pressing overtures of twenty-four hours previously to the

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Governments involved, urging them to abide by the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. It stresses the necessity of sparing the civilian population in all circumstances.

On 11 October, in view of the alarming news reaching it on the plight of the civilian population, the ICRC urged all the belligerents (Iraq, Israel, Arab Republic of Egypt and Syrian Arab Republic) to observe forthwith the provisions of Part IV ("Civilian Population") of the draft Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, in particular Article 46 ("Protection of the Civilian Population"), Article 47 ("General Protection of Civilian Objects") and Article 50 ("Precautions in Attack").

The Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq replied favourably to the ICRC, as did the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the latter provided Israel did the same.

Israel replied thus on 19 October: "In response to the ICRC appeal, the Government of Israel states that it has strictly respected and will continue so to respect the provisions of public international law which prohibit attacks on civilians and civilian objects."

As the ICRC considered that this statement did not answer the question it had asked, on 1 November the Government of Israel—through Mr. R. Kidron, Political Adviser to the Minister for Foreign Affairs—supplemented its reply as follows:

"As you are aware following the extensive conversations which we held on 30 and 31 October, the Government of Israel was both surprised and disappointed by the negative ICRC reaction to its statement. I explained that the ICRC proposal was examined in Jerusalem with the utmost seriousness and attention, and that the statement reproduced above was formulated after most careful consideration.

However, in order to remove any doubts as to its attitude on this matter, I am instructed to state that it is the view of the Government of Israel that the statement of its position transmitted to the ICRC on 19 October 1973 includes and goes well beyond the obligations of Articles 46, 47 and 50 of the Draft Additional Protocol mentioned in the ICRC note of 11 October 1973 in that it comprises the entire body of public international law, both written and

customary, relative to the protection of civilians and civilian objects from attack in international armed conflicts.

I trust that this explanation of my Government's position will be accepted by the ICRC in the positive spirit in which it is made, and that the record will be corrected accordingly."

Prisoners of War

When fighting began, the ICRC asked the parties to the conflict for lists of prisoners of war and permission to visit them. By the end of October, the ICRC had received lists from Israel relating to 2167 Egyptian prisoners of war, 354 Syrian prisoners of war, 17 Iraqi prisoners of war and 5 Moroccan prisoners of war. In Israel, ICRC delegates were able to visit the prisoners in hospitals, and on 19 October they made an initial visit to some 800 sound prisoners in a camp.

The ICRC received from the Egyptian authorities the names of 85 Israeli prisoners of war, including 37 soldiers who had surrendered to the Egyptian armed forces in the presence of an ICRC delegate, at Port Tawfiq on 13 October, and the names of 45 wounded prisoners whom ICRC delegates in Cairo visited in a hospital.

Lebanon notified the capture of two Israeli pilots, who were visited by the ICRC in a Beirut hospital.

The ICRC has received no list from the Syrian authorities, and its delegates in Damascus have not yet been able to visit the Israeli prisoners in Syrian hands.

The ICRC has renewed its approaches, in Geneva and in the field, with a view to securing early permission from all parties to the conflict to visit prisoners and to receiving capture notifications.

Relief

The ICRC has also made arrangements to maintain co-ordination with National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies and to send speedy replies to requests received from the countries involved in the conflict.

A general appeal has been issued to all National Societies for donations in cash and in kind. At the same time, the ICRC has

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

despatched to the Middle East some 15 tons of emergency medicaments, partly donated by Red Cross Societies. These supplies were carried by the DC-6 aircraft made available to the ICRC by the Swiss Confederation.

The aircraft made an initial flight to Beirut and Nicosia on 13 October. It carried five delegates who were experts in relief, logistics and radiocommunication. The cargo consisted of 7 tons of emergency medicaments, including 1,000 doses of blood plasma, plus radio equipment.

The supplies were unloaded at Beirut,¹ in co-operation with the Lebanese Red Cross, while the blood plasma and a batch of emergency medicaments were forwarded to Syria in lorries, in response to an initial request from the National Society.

The second flight brought to Cairo approximately 7 tons of emergency medicaments (intravenous drip material, penicillin, dried plasma, physiological serum) donated by the Red Cross Societies of France, Finland and Switzerland and the ICRC. The remainder of the cargo (1.2 tons from the Swedish Red Cross) was unloaded at Nicosia, where the ICRC had set up an advanced base for operations.

On 23 October, a third flight took place, to Cairo with further emergency medicament supplies.

On 26 October, a helicopter with which the ICRC had been provided by the Israeli authorities brought 200 litres of blood and 200 units of blood plasma to the Egyptian Third Army, on the east bank of the Suez Canal. The operation was repeated two days later, when 117 litres of blood and 200 units of plasma were carried.

On 28 October, the ICRC arranged for a convoy of about a dozen lorries to leave Cairo with food and medicaments for civilians and soldiers in the town of Suez.

On 30 October, an ICRC aircraft flew to Cairo with 4 tons of medicaments.

On 31 October, an aircraft again took off, this time for Tel Aviv. It carried a load of more than 3 tons of medical supplies.

¹ *Plate.*

Meeting on ICRC Action

On 25 October, the ICRC called a meeting in Geneva to discuss Red Cross action on behalf of Middle East conflict victims. The meeting was attended by representatives of twenty-two National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies. The League was represented by its Secretary General, Mr. Henrik Beer, and a number of League officials. Mr. R. Gallopin, President of the ICRC Executive Board, stressed the need for co-operation and co-ordination within the Red Cross as a whole in order to ensure quick and effective protection and aid.

At the meeting, the ICRC described its activities in the Middle East for several years past and the plan of action it had put into operation at the outbreak of the present conflict, and it put forward a plan of assistance with ICRC co-ordination and full Red Cross participation. The cost of the programme, based on an initial appraisal of needs, is estimated at 8 million Swiss francs over a period of four months.

The National Societies of the following countries were present: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Iran, Italy, Japan, Mauritania, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Trinity and Tobago, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States of America, USSR and Yugoslavia.

Organization in the field

On 31 October, ICRC arrangements in the field comprised:

- Six delegations: *Amman* (three delegates); *Beirut* (four delegates); *Damascus* (four delegates); *Cairo* (five delegates). The ICRC delegation in Israel and the occupied territories includes an office in *Tel Aviv* (three delegates) and two sub-delegations in *Gaza* (five delegates) and *Jerusalem* (four delegates). The size of the personnel is in relation to the ICRC's duties towards the Arab civilian population of occupied territories. *Nicosia* (two delegates).
- A radiocommunication network with Geneva comprising five stations (Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem and Nicosia).

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

- Two warehouses for relief supplies at Beirut and Nicosia with stocks of medicaments and emergency supplies.

* * *

In order to meet the deadline for publication, this report goes up to the end of October, but the ICRC's 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.
