

A HUMANITARIAN CERTIFICATE

The ICRC travel document

The International Review has often referred to the humanitarian importance of the ICRC travel document, especially when events produce massive movements of people across frontiers. Recent examples are the transfers of people from Uganda to various countries which granted them asylum and from the island of Guam to other places. In the first instance, the travel documents were given to refugees of Indian origin and in the second to Vietnamese refugees. In both cases, the ICRC document rendered a great service to its recipients.

We believe it may be useful to recall the nature of the travel document and the purpose of the International Committee in providing it.

At the end of World War II, the urgency of many problems confronting them made it impossible for some governments to give sufficient attention to various categories of war victims, especially to refugees and displaced persons who had lost their identity documents or who could not obtain renewal of their passports.

It was to remedy this situation that the ICRC created the "travel document", whose original purpose was to enable those receiving it to return to their countries, to remain in the countries where they were or to go on to other countries.

There are no government-established legal provisions covering the ICRC travel document. Information about the civil status of the bearer consists only of the statements made in his application to the ICRC. The travel document does not therefore have the authentic character of an official document delivered by public authorities, certifying the identity of the bearer, such as a passport, identity card, etc. Its validity is therefore subject to its recognition by the governments of host countries and by their diplomatic and consular agents. The ICRC therefore does not

provide the document except with the agreement of the government of the country to which the applicants intend to go.

In most cases, the ICRC travel documents are requested either by the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (if the applicant is not eligible for the assistance of that organization) or by the National Red Cross Society in the country where the refugee is. These two institutions provide the ICRC with sufficient evidence of the good faith of the applicants.

The documents are still provided to enable civilians to emigrate to countries of their choosing. They are only given however to persons who do not possess identity documents or whose passports have become invalid.

An ICRC travel document can only be delivered when the three following conditions are met:

1. The applicant has no valid passport or possibility of obtaining one;
2. Authorization to leave the country has been given the applicant;
3. The diplomatic or consular representatives of the country to which the applicant wishes to travel have promised an entry visa.

The travel document is delivered without charge. Its validity is usually limited to three months, a period considered sufficient for the necessary formalities and the arrangements for migration. In principle, the document is not renewable. It is essentially intended to permit a single journey to a final host country. It has no value after the refugee has arrived in the host country; it is then up to the authorities of that country to provide the refugee with an official identity document.
