

CIVIL PROTECTION

ACTIONS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES ¹

A. INTRODUCTION

I. Subject and Purpose of the Report

This report deals with Red Cross participation in civil defence, i.e. in practical measures taken by government or private organizations on a national level for the protection of civilian populations and property from the effects of armed conflicts and natural disaster and for the provision of help to victims of events of that kind.

It must not be forgotten that the work of the National Societies in connection with civil defence is but one of two aspects of Red Cross efforts to safeguard populations from the effects of war. The other aspect consists of the development of international humanitarian law, which should reinforce the respect due to non-combatants. It is obvious that the two are closely connected. The effectiveness of civil defence and, consequently, of National Society activity in this field, depends to a great extent on the recognition and observance of international law relating to respect for civilian populations and the organizations assisting them.

The purpose of the present report is to give a brief over-all view of the subject, particularly of the practical problems confronting National Societies and possible solutions thereto.

The XXth International Conference of the Red Cross seems indeed to present an opportunity for such a survey: many National Societies have experience in this field; the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies ¹ have

¹ Report submitted by the ICRC and the League to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross, Vienna, 1965. This Report also comprises annexes which are not reproduced here.

issued several reports on various aspects of the matter which should be better correlated; and it would appear appropriate to combine all elements for the benefit of the young National Societies.

This report will not therefore examine the details of the main issues, but will merely mention them, adding references to documents already published by the international institutions of the Red Cross and to experience conveyed to them by National Societies.

II. Background

1. Origin of Red Cross interest in civil defence

Immediately after the First World War, when the Red Cross began to concern itself with the protection of civilian populations against the effects of war, it did not at first envisage taking part in practical precautions. Through the intermediary of the ICRC, its efforts were solely directed to the improvement of international law relating to civilian populations. However, through its studies of the dangers of chemical warfare, the XIIth International Conference of the Red Cross (Geneva 1925) realized that the possibility of breaches of international agreement in this field could not be dismissed and that the efforts of the Red Cross in the legislative sphere should be backed up by practical measures.

Subsequently the ICRC convened an International Commission of Experts in Brussels (1928) and in Rome (1929), urging it to examine not only the dangers of chemical warfare but also those of air raids. It was by this Commission that, apart from other questions, the role of National Societies in civil defence was examined for the first time. In the opinion of the experts, a documentation centre to be set up by the ICRC should give this new National Society activity support and backing in the form of technical advice and information. The ICRC complied with this recommendation and the Centre, which was established in 1931, operated until 1939. This period was the first milestone in the National Societies' contribution to civil defence.

The work of this Commission of Experts enabled the XIVth International Conference of the Red Cross (Brussels, 1930) to

define the tasks to be assumed by National Societies in civil defence and to stress that they were an imperious duty.

2. *Situation after the Second World War*

During the Second World War the extension of Red Cross activity to benefit civilian populations proved to be an absolute necessity. After the war, therefore, the Red Cross endeavoured to strengthen the legal basis for its activity, both nationally and internationally. The League Board of Governors at its XIXth and XXth Sessions (Oxford, 1946 and Stockholm, 1948) had this activity included in the "fundamental principles" of National Societies whilst, in addition, the XVIIth International Conference of the Red Cross (Stockholm, 1948) recommended National Societies to include this activity in their statutes, and governments to give it their recognition internationally.

The 1949 Geneva Convention, upon entering into force, induced several National Societies to consider what practical role they could assume in civil defence. The studies carried out by the international bodies of the Red Cross in this field were then resumed and developed. In 1952, following an extensive enquiry among National Societies, the League published a "Guide for National Red Cross Societies on their Role as Auxiliaries of the Army Medical and Civil Defence Services". In 1955, work concomitant with the League Executive Committee reached the stage of an exchange of views at a meeting of representatives from 29 National Societies, the League and the ICRC².

This problem was included on the agenda of all subsequent large international Red Cross meetings. In view of the reports presented by the League and the ICRC, the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross (New Delhi, 1957) and the Council of Delegates (Prague, 1961) again asserted the importance they attributed to the activities of National Societies in matters of civil defence and they expressed the wish that these activities be developed along the lines advocated in those reports. During the

² See "The Role of National Societies in the Sphere of Civilian Protection": report submitted by the League to the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross, New Delhi, 1957.

Centenary Congress of the International Red Cross (Geneva, 1963), several National Societies made known their practical experience, in compliance with the wishes expressed by the ICRC and the League in their joint report.

B. LEGAL BASIS FOR RED CROSS ACTIVITY IN CIVIL DEFENCE

I. International Red Cross Resolutions and Principles:
National Society Statutes

The relevant resolutions passed by International Conferences of the Red Cross since 1925 and by the 1961 Council of Delegates in Prague, particularly those based on recommendations contained in League and ICRC reports, clearly show that participation in civil defence is in fact considered to be one of the main duties of a National Society. The latest of these resolutions, for instance, adopted at Prague, stresses that:

... co-operation of National Red Cross Societies in government efforts aiming at protecting the civilian population in the event of armed conflict constitutes a natural task for those Societies and is in keeping with the principles of the Red Cross.

In addition, as mentioned in the resolution just quoted, this activity is also suggested to National Societies by the Red Cross principles³.

This duty should, therefore, be reflected in National Society statutes. This may in some cases require amendments to statutes⁴, as for a long time, from the point of view of their activities in favour of war victims, National Societies were solely auxiliary to the Army Medical Services.

³ Principle of Humanity "Declaration of Red Cross Principles", Council of Delegates, Prague, 1961, and Principle No. 6, "Fundamental Principles", Board of Governors of the League, XIXth and XXth Session, Oxford, 1946 and Stockholm, 1948.

⁴ Doc. DS 4/1 "Actions of National Societies in the field of Civil Population Protection", joint ICRC/League report to the Centenary Congress of the International Red Cross, Geneva, August-September, 1963.

II. International Law

National Societies active in civil defence, owing to their being part and parcel of the civilian population, are first and foremost protected by the rules and principles of the law of nations relating to the security of non-combatants. In common law, indeed, hostile action may not be directed against the civilian population.

This principle was confirmed in certain provisions laid down in the Hague Regulations and especially in the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention. The latter affords protection notably to relief societies in occupied territories (Article 63), their contact with protected persons (Articles 30 and 142), civilian hospitals and their personnel (Articles 18 and 20), as well as to several types of function which National Societies may discharge for the benefit of civilian victims of hostilities⁵.

These guarantees are of great value. However, pursuant to the recommendation of the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross (New Delhi, 1957)⁶ and following suggestions from several National Societies, the ICRC considered whether the protection afforded by the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to societies for relief to civilian populations should not be augmented and strengthened. Experts on the matter gave an affirmative reply upon being consulted. Consequently, after having been on the agenda of the Council of Delegates in Prague (1961) and of the Centenary Congress (Geneva, 1963), this problem will again be discussed at the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross⁷ to which the ICRC will be submitting an extensive report on the problem of international regulations in this field and possible solutions thereto.⁸

⁵ These activities are listed in "Guide for National Red Cross Societies on their role as Auxiliaries of the Army Medical and Civil Defence Services", League, Geneva, 1952, pp. 25-28.

⁶ Resolution XIII of this Conference states, *inter alia* : "... the Conference ... urges the ICRC to continue its efforts for the protection of the civilian population against the evils of war ...".

⁷ Item 5 b of the provisional agenda of the International Humanitarian Law Commission.

⁸ Conf. D 5 b/1 "Status of Civil Defence Personnel", A study of regulations intended to reinforce the guarantees which international humanitarian law affords to non-military civil defence organizations. ICRC report to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross, Vienna, 1965.

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C. MAIN PROBLEMS CONFRONTING NATIONAL RED CROSS SOCIETIES

I. National Societies and Civil Defence in their own countries

1. *The role of National Societies*

The studies carried out by the ICRC and the League, like the experience of National Societies, show that the Red Cross as such could not, generally speaking, assume full responsibility for civil defence in any country. This is a field in which, like many others, the National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities. Only such exceptional circumstances as indicated below might induce a National Society to endeavour to assume on its own the duty of bringing relief to populations suffering hardship as a result of hostilities.

It is hardly necessary to remind anyone that this function of an auxiliary is in keeping with the spirit underlying the tasks devolving on National Societies in general, the Societies having originally been established as auxiliaries to the army medical services. In fact, this auxiliary character has been preserved in the Red Cross principles⁹ and the conditions for recognition of National Societies.

However, in keeping with Red Cross principles, it is up to National Societies co-operating with State authorities responsible for civil defence to retain their independence. This will be achieved if they "maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles".¹⁰

As already mentioned, it may happen that in certain circumstances a National Society may be the only body in a position to come to the help of populations sorely tried by hostilities. We have particularly in mind two types of circumstance. In the first place, during an international conflict, in the event of an advance or withdrawal of the firing line, or an uprising in occupied territory, there may be for a time an absence of legal authority and public services. Intermittent hostile action may occur but the former occupying forces' place may not have been taken over completely by the enemy. In such a case it may be that only the Red Cross is able to help the victims of the continuing hostilities. The new regulations advocated by the ICRC to strengthen the guarantees in favour of

^{9 10} "Declaration of Red Cross Principles", Council of Delegates, Prague, 1961. Cf. Principle of Independence.

civil defence personnel should permit such personnel to carry out their work under all circumstances, including such a situation as just described. However, until such time as these regulations are established, it is possible that in this situation the official civil defence services may be paralyzed or withdrawn to some other place; the Red Cross would then be alone on the spot to give succour to the victims.

In the second place, consideration should be given to the case of internal conflict (civil war, serious disturbances) when official civil defence services might well be partly or completely paralyzed. In such an event the National Society, thanks to its neutrality, may be the only body to intervene on behalf of victims, whether combatants or civilian population. It may take under its responsibility and flag any units of the official services still able to give effective help in personnel or equipment.

Both of these eventualities—in which the National Societies would be not auxiliaries but the sole, albeit temporary, incumbent of a heavy task—show how important it is for the National Societies to have their own first-aid teams and relief units capable of serving not only in the civil defence organization, but also as autonomous bodies in case of need.

Even in time of peace, the National Society's role may go beyond that of an auxiliary service, apart from its work in the event of minor natural disaster when it is able to cope with needs single-handed. It may happen, in a major natural catastrophe taxing all the resources of the nation's relief services, that the Red Cross agents through the rapidity with which they can go into action, may function as an emergency service until the remainder of the organization is on the job.

There is also need to consider the position of National Societies which have not only an auxiliary role but must also take initiative in countries without a civil defence service, as in a number of developing countries, for example. In such circumstances it is up to National Societies to approach the authorities to propose the organization of a civil defence service. By so doing they can stress that such an organization entails co-ordination of existing services or institutions (fire-brigade, police, Red Cross and other aid Societies) rather than the setting up of new State services.

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In addition, and particularly in developing countries, the National Societies can emphasize that civil defence should be given its rightful place in the country's development. It would, as it were, constitute a form of insurance, to some extent, against the destructive effects of natural disaster or armed conflict, which might reduce to nought the progress achieved at the cost of great sacrifice.

2. *Co-operation with Government* ¹¹

a) **Forms of co-operation**

Red Cross co-operation with government services most frequently encountered takes the following forms:

— Assumption of some or all of the responsibility for particular aspects of civil defence (e.g. blood transfusion, training of medical personnel and first-aiders, education of the public, etc.).

— Seconding of personnel to Civil Defence, whether as individuals or teams and with or without equipment.

Either of these forms of co-operation may be carried on, or both simultaneously, and they should be completed by representation of the National Society on the country's civil defence council. This would enable the National Society to check that agreements with the government are properly implemented and also, to some extent, to induce the national civil defence service to carry out its duties in a manner compatible with Red Cross principles.

b) **Legal basis**

To ensure that co-operation with government services develops smoothly and efficiently, it must be built up from a sound legal basis. Consequently, any civil defence legislation should make provision for co-operation with private organizations and a special agreement between the government and the National Society should lay down the details of co-operation. Such an agreement should, *inter alia*, guarantee the National Society full liberty to carry out its activities in conformity with Red Cross principles.

¹¹ D 695: "Co-operation of National Red Cross Societies in Civil Defence", joint ICRC/League report to the Council of Delegates, Prague, 1961, pp. 8-12.

II. Activities

1. *Their Nature*

Apart from the needs imposed by local conditions and the limitations of its own resources, a National Society must observe certain principles in deciding what civil defence activities it should undertake.

In the first place, it will give priority to activities which no other organization is carrying out effectively: one guiding principle is that the Red Cross should not seek to do what others are already doing sufficiently well, but to intervene where there is a need, a gap or a deficiency.

Secondly, it is important that National Societies undertake activities for which they are especially qualified by their very nature. In general these activities are characterized by their urgency and their call for large scale voluntary public action. Indeed, National Societies are accustomed to acting on the spot and their appeals to the public generally meet with success; thanks to the Red Cross tradition for humanitarian action and to the Red Cross spirit. In addition, National Societies are essentially intended to attend to certain tasks covered by the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention.

In the third place, Red Cross co-operation in civil defence should preferably be in fields in which the National Society has already gained experience. The efficiency of its co-operation will thereby be the greater and it will avoid dispersal of its forces, which is a constant danger.

2. *Examples of Activities*

a) **Medical Assistance**¹²

First-Aid.—In the medical assistance which many National Societies give to Civil Defence, first-aid is preponderant. This is

¹² See: "Guide for National Red Cross Societies on their role as Auxiliaries of the Army and Civil Defence Services", Geneva, 1952, pp. 31-55.

League Report to the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross, New Delhi, January-February 1957: "The Role of National Societies in the Sphere of Civilian Protection", pp. 25-26.

ICRC Report to the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross, New Delhi, January-February 1957: "The Role of National Societies in the Sphere of Civilian Protection", pp. 3-7.

because first-aid is one of the basic activities of the Red Cross. This task includes the training of first-aid workers and instructors for the civil defence services and, in addition, instruction to the general public in matters relating to first-aid. Courses should be adapted to meet the needs of Civil Defence and designed to make complete and qualified teams available. Obviously these tasks must be undertaken already in time of peace.

First-aid services may be organized in several ways. Some Societies merely maintain first-aid teams; others, veritable nationwide emergency networks of first-aid posts; others again may have mobile relief squads comprising not only first-aiders, but even doctors and nurses.

Medical Personnel and Equipment.—Another National Society function is to make professional and auxiliary medical personnel available to Civil Defence.

So far as professional personnel (doctors and nurses) is concerned, the task is one of recruiting to meet needs in the event of war. However, this personnel should be given courses in civil defence in general and its special tasks as a part of the civil defence force. These courses should be organized by the government, the National Society or the professional associations. Some National Societies have organized courses on special subjects such as illnesses and injuries due to radiation.

As for auxiliary personnel the National Societies should supply the civil defence service with nursing auxiliaries (nursing assistants). In many cases this involves not only recruitment and instruction in civil defence, but also basic training in care of casualties.

In this field some National Societies—in agreement with their governments—have set up actual national hospital service reserves which include nurses no longer in active service and nursing auxiliaries. This system entails the organization of an extensive programme of instruction, both for nurses requiring refresher courses and for nursing auxiliaries, many of whom are in fact members of the National Society units. These nursing auxiliaries are given first-aid training and in-service courses in a hospital.

In the medical field, Red Cross assistance can include the storage of medical supplies and equipment, already in time of peace.

Several National Societies do this. Such stocks should, in particular, contain equipment for the setting up of auxiliary hospitals in case of need.

Blood Transfusion.—This is another field offering scope for National Society co-operation in the medical aspects of civil defence. In this connection many Societies are already assuming responsibilities which extend not only to war and natural disasters, but also to sickness and accidents of every-day occurrence, for which blood transfusion is increasingly important in modern medicine.

The Red Cross is well placed to undertake work in the field of blood transfusion. It contributes to the maintenance of the voluntary character of blood donation; it protects donors against commercial exploitation; it ensures that everybody can afford blood and blood products when required.

The National Society's role varies from country to country, but there are three main types of function which are discernible:

1. full responsibility for the national blood transfusion service;
2. limited responsibility: donor recruiting; drawing and storing of whole blood and distribution to hospitals, but not preparing plasma or blood products and not carrying out research;
3. propaganda and donor recruiting.

b) **Other forms of assistance** ¹³

Material and moral aid.—Many National Societies are disposed to help with the provision of shelters, foodstuffs and clothing. Some of them—in order to be able to supply immediate help—maintain peace-time stocks of food, clothes, blankets and sometimes even prefabricated huts.

The Red Cross can also give moral support to the victims it helps materially, by personal contact through its agents, particularly its social workers. This type of support is sometimes a decisive factor enabling victims the better to contend with their hardships.

¹³ See: " Guide . . . ", pp. 33-38, Geneva, 1952; League report, pp. 26-27, New Delhi, 1957; ICRC report, pp. 3-7, New Delhi, 1957.

Tracing of missing persons.—Several National Societies have a Tracing Service. Some have been given responsibility by the authorities to carry out this mission; even in some instances to set up official bureaux for information on war victims, and their function sometimes includes the tracing of missing civilians. In view of the knowledge and administrative experience required by such a task it can only be undertaken by those Societies which have the requisite qualifications.

However, any National Society can fulfil an auxiliary role by means of liaison with the government tracing service. It can, for instance, supply voluntary workers during periods of intense activity or act as intermediary between the service and enquirers in case of serious events.

Education in civil defence matters.—Many National Societies participate in civil defence education of people working in one way or another with Civil Defence and also of the civilian population as a whole.

For such people as first-aiders, medical personnel, social workers, etc., with specific civil defence functions, courses cover civil defence in general (e.g. its purpose, organization, defence techniques) as well as the particular tasks which would be their responsibility.

The primary aim of educating the public in general is to impart self-discipline to the population and thus avoid panic. It also teaches measures of self-protection, including first-aid. To achieve these objectives the National Societies organize courses and lectures; they have recourse to the press, radio and television. However, this is a form of activity calling for circumspection on the part of the Red Cross, for some aspects of civil defence are sometimes the subject of controversy on a national scale, in which case the National Society would be well advised to leave publicity strictly to official organizations.

Welfare Workers.—For all services undertaking relief, tracing or civil defence instruction—whether belonging to the Red Cross or to other organizations—welfare workers are essential. Some National Societies therefore make qualified social assistants and auxiliary personnel available to Civil Defence. The auxiliary

personnel in many cases are trained at special courses by the National Societies.

c) **Tasks devolving on the Red Cross under the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention**¹⁴

Regulations for implementation of international treaty agreements are mainly a government responsibility. However, National Societies are fully entitled to take an interest in the implementation of Conventions which, like those of Geneva, were to a large extent prepared by and constitute a fundamental charter for the Red Cross.

National Societies may—indeed they should—be concerned with the implementation or planning of minimum preparatory measures within their own spheres. They may be directly interested in and confided with the carrying out of some such measures. In so far as their participation in civil defence is concerned, the National Societies should give particular attention to the following articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention:

1) *Articles 18 and 20 : Civilian hospitals and their personnel*

These articles call for government regulations on official recognition and identification markings of civilian hospitals and their personnel. Some National Societies have co-operated with their governments in this connection, acting as technical consultants and it is a fact that their war-time medical experience makes them well qualified for such preparatory work.

2) *Article 24 (3) : Identity discs for children*

According to this article, governments should arrange a system of identification for children. Several National Societies have co-operated with their governments in this, particularly in the study of various systems of identification and publicity where measures envisaged by the government are not compulsory.

¹⁴ See: *Commentary* on the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, ICRC, Geneva, 1956; "The Role of National Societies in the Sphere of Civilian Protection", League report to the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross, New Delhi, 1957, pp. 12-27; and "Implementation and Dissemination of the Geneva Conventions". ICRC report to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross, Vienna, 1965, (item 3 of the provisional agenda of the International Humanitarian Law Commission),

3) *Article 144 : Dissemination of the Conventions*

Under the terms of this article, governments have undertaken to include the study of the Conventions in their programmes of military and, if possible, civil instruction, so that the principles thereof may become known to the entire population. Their dissemination, particularly among the armed forces, is an indispensable condition of their proper application. In many countries, the National Society helps the government to discharge this treaty obligation by the publication of information and by organizing courses on the Geneva Conventions.

4) *Article 14 : Hospital and safety zones and localities*

States may establish these zones and localities in peace-time or during an armed conflict by earmarking and equipping certain areas for that purpose. National Societies, in case of need, will draw the government's attention to the possibility of establishing such zones and they may be called upon to take part in their organization.
