

## Some ICRC Activities in 1964

The ICRC published an Annual Report in which as usual it reviewed the work accomplished during the past year<sup>1</sup>.

In spite of the relative calm which characterized the year 1964 on the international level, the ICRC, for its part, had to undertake multiple and often extremely difficult tasks. In a world evolving ever faster, several countries were still shaken by violence. In order to come to the aid of the victims of these conflicts, the ICRC has been obliged to face some unexpected situations which raised complicated problems. It attempted to adapt its action to these new circumstances so as to maintain its own effectiveness. The present report will enable an estimate to be made of how far it was successful.

However, 1964 was also the year of the centenary of the first Geneva Convention. In this connection it should be noted that the Conventions at present in force, those of 1949, have, on a number of occasions, shown their usefulness during the past year. This was particularly the case of their article 3, which allows the ICRC to offer its services in internal conflicts. In this way remains alive and beneficent the spirit which presided over the signature a hundred years ago of that first Convention which is the basis of all modern humanitarian international law.

The *Annual Report* also describes the legal work undertaken by the ICRC, whose purpose it is to give ever more effective protection to the victims of conflicts or of internal disturbances.

It finally concludes with an account of the institution's financial position, supplemented by various tables which we also publish in this issue.

Some extracts from the Report relative to the activities in Asia and special services of the ICRC are given below.

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<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report 1964*. ICRC, Geneva, 1965. 80 pages. This report is published in French, English and Spanish and a mimeographed edition will soon be available in German.

ASIA

Laos

The recrudescence of hostilities in the interior of Laos obliged the ICRC to open up a new phase in its activity on behalf of the victims, in particular of the wounded and sick, as well as of civilians who had fled from the danger areas.

At the beginning of March, the Laotian Red Cross made an urgent appeal to the ICRC for blood plasma for hospitals and infirmaries in the fighting zones. The ICRC immediately despatched a batch of 100 flasks of preserved blood. To this was added shortly afterwards a gift of 300 flasks offered by the Netherlands Red Cross.

Subsequently, Mr. André Durand, delegate general of the ICRC for Asia, went to Laos where he was able to assess requirements. He observed that some 23,000 persons had fled the fighting areas and were devoid of all means of existence.

Following on these observations and the request made by the Laotian Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies on June 8 addressed an appeal to several member Societies on behalf of the victims of the Laotian conflict. This appeal, whose object was to meet the refugees' most urgent needs for an initial period of three months, asked for the despatch of sweetened concentrated milk for children, sugar, soap, mosquito netting, material for making clothing, multivitamins, substitutes for blood plasma, anti-snake bite serum, instruments for minor surgery and various pharmaceutical products. The National Societies were also requested to make funds available, either locally or in neighbouring countries, to enable purchases to be made, thereby avoiding lengthy delays in routing.

Already by July, contributions paid or announced as a result of this appeal reached a total value of 100,000 Swiss francs<sup>1</sup>. A little more than one-third of this sum represented contributions in kind, the rest consisting of cash donations.

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<sup>1</sup> A portion of these donations was distributed in 1965.

Dr. Jürg Baer, doctor-delegate of the ICRC, then rejoined the delegate general, Mr. Durand, at Vientiane. He shortly afterwards left for Cambodia and Australia. He was charged with organizing in various parts of Laos the distribution of relief collected as a result of the appeal of June 8.

In the framework of aid to displaced persons, Dr. Baer handed a cheque to the Laotian Ministry of Social Welfare for 2,500 dollars as a contribution for the new village of Ban Amon (" the village of men who have escaped death "). He made a series of tours in various parts of the Kingdom, notably in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Thakhek and Paksane, during which he distributed relief supplies of food and clothing to refugees, as well as medicaments to hospitals. He undertook this activity in close co-operation with the Laotian Red Cross.

The ICRC also concerned itself with military captured during the events in Laos. It thus had printed in Vientiane cards notifying capture and message forms in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Produced in English and Lao, these cards were chiefly intended for Americans detained by the Pathet Lao.

During the course of a mission to Khangkhay, in the " Plaine des Jarres ", Mr. Durand, delegate general of the ICRC, handed these cards personally to Prince Souphanouvong, President of the Neo Lao Haksat. He also at the same time met Mr. Phoumi Vongvichit, Minister of Information.

One result of this was that the ICRC was able to transmit messages written to the family of an air force lieutenant whose aircraft had been shot down over territory held by the Pathet Lao.

## **Viet Nam**

The ICRC attempted to intervene on behalf of the victims of the events in both South and North Viet Nam.

In Saigon, capital of the Republic of Viet Nam (South), Mr. André Durand, delegate general of the ICRC for Asia, was

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received in February by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior, who gave him authorization to visit persons detained on account of the events. On February 21 he made the first visit, to the prison of Chi Hoa. The following day, accompanied by Dr. Pham Van Hat, President of the Vietnamese Red Cross, he went to the Phu Loi camp where he had several talks with the detainees.

In April the delegate general continued his mission of visiting places of detention and went to the Con Son penitentiary in the island of Poulo Condore off the Mekong delta. Subsequently, Mr. Werner Muller, ICRC delegate in Saigon, took over this activity. Together with the leading members of the Vietnamese Red Cross he visited, in September and October, various places of detention where he handed relief to the prisoners.

Mention should also be made that, as a result of the devastating typhoons which caused great damage in South Viet Nam in November, the ICRC, at the request of the League of Red Cross Societies, organizer of international relief actions in cases of natural disaster, placed its delegate, Mr. Muller, at the League's disposal. The delegate then assisted in the reception of donations and in the purchasing of relief supplies before the arrival of a League representative to the spot.

The ICRC also concerned itself with the position of American nationals, both military and civilian, who had been captured by the forces of the "National Front of Liberation of South Viet Nam". In order to establish contact with them, it made various representations which had not produced any results by the end of the year, in spite of a little information it had been able to collect about the position of the prisoners, thanks to an account published by an Australian journalist who had been in the jungle with the insurgents. It tried nevertheless to have some relief parcels reach the prisoners, but was unable to discover whether they actually reached their destination.

As a result of the bombing of certain points on the coast of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (North), the ICRC offered its services to the North Vietnamese Red Cross, in the framework of the Geneva Conventions. That Society thanked the International

Committee for its offer, but stated that it was able, for the moment, to deal with the situation itself.

The ICRC also transmitted to the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam the requests for news made by the families of the two American pilots whose aircraft had been shot down on August 5. On September 7, the wife of one of the airmen sent through the intermediary of the American Red Cross, the first of the letters which the ICRC transmitted to Hanoi. In return, the ICRC received on September 26 from the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam a long missive from one of the prisoners reassuring his family about his health and the conditions of his internment. In the following months, this correspondence continued normally through the intermediary of Geneva.

### **Indonesia**

After the outbreak of hostilities between Indonesian infiltrators and Malaysian forces, Mr. André Durand, delegate general of the ICRC for Asia, went to Djakarta, the Indonesian capital, on November 28. He was received by the leading members of the Indonesian Red Cross, which had asked the ICRC to deal with the question of Indonesian prisoners in Malaysia. He noted that the Indonesian Red Cross had been called upon to give instruction in the Geneva Conventions to certain groups of volunteers with engagements to fight against the Federation of Malaysia.

### **Malaysia**

After his stay in Djakarta, the delegate general went to Kuala Lumpur, capital of the Federation of Malaysia, where he was received by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, and by other government representatives. These meetings enabled him to observe that the government did not accept the fact that the Geneva Conventions were applicable to the armed conflict in which Indonesia was opposing it. Those with whom he spoke did, however, promise that he would be given every facility to visit Indonesian prisoners and transmit their mail. They took care to point out,

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however, that these persons were not considered to be prisoners of war within the meaning of the Conventions. At all events, intervention by the delegate general on behalf of two Indonesian nationals condemned to death resulted in an indefinite stay of execution.

Mr. Durand then undertook a tour of prisons in which were detained Indonesians who had been captured during the course of military operations. He proceeded for that purpose to Negeri Sembilan, Johore Bahru and Singapore, as well as to Sarawak and Sabah in North Borneo.

All the prisoners were held as a result of sentences by courts or by reason of legal provisions relating to national security. The ICRC representative, during the course of his visits which were prolonged until early 1965, collected some 200 letters for the families of the Indonesian detainees. Thanks to the intermediary of the Malaysian Red Cross, this mail was despatched via Bangkok to the Indonesian Red Cross which it transmitted to the recipients.

### Japan

The repatriation operations of Koreans resident in Japan who wished to proceed to the place of their own choosing in their country of origin were continued throughout 1964. We would recall that this repatriation is effected under the auspices of the Japanese Red Cross in the presence of ICRC delegates who ensure that none leaves against his will.

In 1964, eight vessels left Niigata for Chong Jin in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. On board were carried 1,822 persons, which brought the total number of Koreans repatriated since the beginning of the operations in December 1959 to 82,665. ICRC representatives present at embarkations were Mr. Michel Testuz, delegate, and Miss Elsa Casal, assistant delegate, then Mr. André Durand, delegate general for Asia.

The earthquake of June 16, which caused havoc in one part of the Japanese Archipelago, seriously damaged the port of Niigata. In consequence, the repatriation operations were interrupted for three months and could not be resumed until September 22.

## SPECIAL SERVICES

**Central Tracing Agency (Geneva)**

Even twenty years after the end of the Second World War, the activity of the Central Tracing Agency which was previously called the Central Prisoners of War Agency, continues unabated. This important branch of the ICRC in 1964 received 61,449 queries and communications of all sorts (as against 47,512 in 1963) whilst outgoing mail consisted of no less than 60,987 items as against 50,300 for the previous year.

This activity of the Central Tracing Agency in connection with all conflicts and their aftermath is of considerable importance by reason of its humanitarian effects, in view of the fact that many archives in countries stricken by war were destroyed, so that the records held in Geneva are in many cases the only source of information available to former prisoners of war or other victims of hostilities. The Agency has already been the means of bringing comfort to millions of human beings to judge from the following figures: for the period from 1939-1945 alone, the Agency compiled 36 million index cards representing some 15 million individual cases.

Far from becoming any less useful in 1964, this card index relating to the Second World War was put to even greater use than in previous years. In fact, there are many veterans who are now approaching retiring age and who, in order to supplement pensions to which they are entitled are required to produce evidence that they were prisoners of war or interned civilians. Upon their request, the Agency issues capture cards. In 1964 it issued 4,795 such cards to former prisoners of all sorts of nationalities.

Thus, work continues to be carried out more or less at full capacity in most of the services in the Central Tracing Agency.

Activity increased in the Italian section: it recorded 15,000 inquiries, that is to say, 10,000 more than in 1963. This increase was caused by the Italian Government's publication of its programme of compensation from funds made available for that purpose by the Federal Republic of Germany. In order to answer applicants wishing to justify their claims to pension, the Agency had to maintain close contact with the International Tracing Service in Arolsen.

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In addition, the Central Tracing Agency's activity has not been immune to the influence of world events. It was particularly affected by the troubles which occurred in the Congo and which gave rise to several hundred inquiries from all over the world, from official government offices, private persons, economic undertakings, and religious groups. The inquiries received in connection with these events concerned people of every race and nationality. Below is a list of countries whose nationals were the subject of communications, tracing work and inquiries : Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Congo, Cyprus, Denmark, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Great Britain and the Commonwealth, Greece, India, Iran, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of South Africa, Rhodesia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Uganda, United Arab Republic, USA, Yugoslavia.

The Agency received 119 Telex messages from Leopoldville giving lists of people who were safe and sound, admitted to hospital, or reported missing, as well as 310 dead, of whom 210 were Belgian nationals.

As a result of the war in the Yemen, the Agency had many messages to convey between prisoners and their families. This was particularly the case for Egyptian soldiers taken prisoner by the Yemeni royalists and for whom the ICRC was the only channel of communication enabling them to give a sign of life to their families.

Again in Viet Nam the Agency acted as an intermediary for the transmission of correspondence between the detainees and their families. However, efforts to contact the American nationals taken prisoner by the National Front of Liberation of South Viet Nam had been unavailing by the end of the year.

All this activity by the Agency necessitates its maintaining close co-operation with many national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Several of these, indeed, have their own tracing services or information bureaux whose card index systems are a source of information in innumerable cases and dovetail with those of the Agency in Geneva, thus enabling inquiries to be brought to a successful conclusion.

At this point mention should be made of the considerably improved co-operation with the National Societies of East European

countries and particularly with the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Soviet Union in Moscow. Thanks to extensive correspondence between the Agency and the National Societies of these countries many family connections which had been lost, sometimes for years, and even since the 1917 revolution, were resumed. Many were the Russian emigrants who turned to the ICRC in the hope of establishing contact with their families in the USSR once again. Numerous inquiries came in from Moscow, sent by Soviet citizens seeking news of a relative who had gone abroad years ago.

Inquiries undertaken by the Agency in response to these requests were frequently successful, thereby giving joy to the people concerned, some of whom made a point of conveying their feelings to the ICRC. As an example, we may quote two tracing cases which were successful :

A Russian emigrant, Mr. V., had been without news of his family since 1918. He had left his parents, 4 brothers and 2 sisters in their homeland and had given them no sign of life. At the beginning of 1964 he finally decided to attempt to resume his contact with them and he was advised by the Soviet consulate in Paris to write to the ICRC. On receiving Mr. V's inquiry, the Central Tracing Agency sent a message to the address in the USSR which he had given. A neighbour replied saying that V's parents had been dead for several years, that 2 brothers were killed during the war, but that two other brothers and the two sisters were still alive. All four had left their native village but the Agency succeeded in tracing them and making contact with them. It shortly afterwards received a letter from one of the brothers in which he expressed his joy on learning that the missing member of the family, about whom he had known nothing for so long, was still alive. In this way these brothers and sisters who had not seen or heard from each other for 47 years were able to correspond, thanks to the ICRC, which received from Mr. V. a moving testimony of gratitude.

The second example concerns Mrs. Olga D. who, with her mother, her three sisters and her brother, lived in a village in the Ukraine. As the family originally came from Germany the occupation authorities sent it back to Germany in 1943 and the son was

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drafted into the Wehrmacht. The mother and her four daughters had to go their separate ways to earn a living. At the end of the war Olga returned to the USSR, married and settled far from her native village. In March 1964, the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva received, through the intermediary of the Soviet Red Cross, an inquiry from Olga who wished to know if the members of her family, of whom she had been without news since 1945, were still alive. Painstaking investigation revealed that one of the sisters, Martha, had migrated to Canada immediately after the war, had married in that country and had been joined by her mother, her sister Alma and her brother Jonat. She had also kept in touch with her fourth sister who had settled in California. Thus, in spite of the fact that inquiries were hampered by the changed names of the sisters who had married in the meantime, and despite the fact that they were so far afield, one being in the USSR and the others in America, family ties were renewed after they had been severed for 19 years.

We would recall that there is a branch of the Central Tracing Agency in Zurich which continues to fulfil a very useful role. At the end of the war this branch, the largest and oldest in Switzerland outside Geneva, employed 330 people. Since that time, thanks to the support given by the town of Zurich which provides premises free of charge, this branch has unceasingly carried out a by no means inconsiderable task and one which is necessary in view of the shortage of personnel at the ICRC headquarters. In 1964 there were only two paid employees in the Zurich branch assisted by several voluntary workers.

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