

CHRONICLE

THE ACTION OF THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES ON BEHALF OF PARALYSED MOROCCANS¹

An important relief action undertaken eighteen months ago by the League of Red Cross Societies on behalf of 10,000 paralysed Moroccans was completed on June 30, 1961, thanks to which the International Rehabilitation Programme, which was conducted at the request of the Red Crescent and the Government of Morocco, was able to have been realised.

This programme was undertaken for the benefit of 10,466 Moroccan children, women and men, paralysed in late 1959, by an adulterated cooking oil.

The League's Secretary-General, Mr. Henrik Beer, announced in this connection the receipt by the League of a \$10,000 grant from the American National Red Cross for a special research project to evaluate the effectiveness of treatment methods used in the large-scale physiotherapy action which is without precedent in medical history.

Some 9,600 of the victims will have been discharged from further treatment at the end of June. The approximately 340 paralysis victims expected to require regular treatment after 30th June, and about the same number still subject to periodic medical control, will receive this under a Moroccan Ministry of Health Programme operated by Moroccan staff, especially trained in physiotherapy work during the past year for this purpose, assisted by a small group of international personnel working under Government contract.

¹ *Press Release from the Information Bureau of the League of Red Cross Societies.*

Final Medical and Social Control.—During the past several months, as Rehabilitation Centres at Alhucemas, Sidi Kacem, Sidi Slimane and Khemisset have been closed, and the residue of patients transferred to the two remaining Centres at Fez and Meknes, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and social workers provided by various Member Societies of the League have carried out a final medical and social control of all patients. Medically, this ensures a uniform classification of the paralysis victims, from the first time the patient came forward for treatment, until June 1961. The social control determines how many patients have had schooling and an occupation and how many have managed to find employment since their illness.

For patients living in areas far removed from the Centres, mobile staff teams were established and are visiting the areas from Nador to Tafilalet and from Tetuan to Agadir.

In the past six months, physiotherapy treatments on a group and class basis were replaced by intensive individual treatment. Special anti-spastic techniques have been used with good results. Orthopaedic workshops established under the Programme have provided hundreds of braces and shoe supports. Corrective plasters have been given to several hundred patients.

Among the remaining 340 patients, a number will require corrective surgery. Arrangements have been made by the Moroccan Government with the British Government for the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in London to provide the services of a *qualified surgical team to do this work during the coming months.*

Morocco is faced with an important problem as concerns the re-settlement of patients. The number of unemployed in the country is substantial and few openings are available for trained workers. It is extremely difficult to find jobs for unskilled workers or to arrange for apprenticeships. Not less than 55 occupations are represented among the victims.

Research Project to Begin Shortly.—Several treatment methods at different stages were used in the Rehabilitation Programme due to the fact that the victims suffered varying degrees of paralysis, depending upon the amount of tri-ortho-cresyl-phosphate,

the poisonous element in the cooking oil, which was absorbed by their systems. To evaluate the effectiveness of the different treatment methods, a Study is to be undertaken shortly by a special League Commission, under the Chairmanship of Prof. Ambrosius von Albertini, Vice-Chairman of the League and President of the Swiss Red Cross. All of the five Chief Medical Officers who have served with the League operation will take part in the Study. A meeting of Chief Medical Officers was convened at the League Secretariat during the month of June to determine the terms of reference for the Study. Also taking part in the Commission's Meeting has been Prof. Karl M. Walthard, Chief of the Physiotherapy Institute of the University of Geneva, who has acted as a Special Consultant to the League for this Programme, and who directed the treatment of 126 Swiss soldiers suffering a similar paralysis in 1945.

The doctors attached to the Centres and other medical experts will also assist with the Study.

The special research project has been made possible by a grant of \$10,000 made through the American National Red Cross.

Unprecedented Peace-Time Medical Staffing Operation.—The greatest number of doctors of physical medicine and physiotherapists ever mobilised for an international operation were required for the Moroccan Rehabilitation Programme. The relative scarcity of these specialists necessitated National Societies making special requests to Hospitals, Medical Schools and Ministries of Health for the loan of staff who could only be freed from duties for limited periods. This required a near continual recruiting effort.

Despite this situation, the Programme was set in motion in six weeks, with fifty doctors, physiotherapists and polio-experienced nurses. The League's Appeal was launched on 21st November 1959 and the International Rehabilitation Programme, under the direction of the Moroccan Government and with the collaboration of the World Health Organisation, got under way on 1st January 1960, in Centres hastily transformed, at considerable expense to the Government, from garages, warehouses and military barracks. Administrative staff necessary for the operation of the Centres, together with some one hundred and fifty Nurses Aides to assist

the international medical and nursing personnel, were provided by the Moroccan Government. The League's first Chief Delegate and Medical Liaison Officer was Prof. Gustave Gingras, Director of the School of Physical Medicine, University of Montreal, whose services were made available through the Canadian Red Cross Society.

In all, the services of 175 medical and nursing personnel were recruited and provided by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of 16 countries. A minimum value of the composite total of 100 years of service performed by this personnel would be approximately 2,135,000 Swiss francs. Costs in connection with these personnel, i.e. their travel to and from Morocco, their salaries, and a daily living allowance, was met by the National Societies recruiting them; the Moroccan Government provided board and lodging.

The General Director for the League operation was Mr. Ray T. Schæffer, Special Assistant to the League's Secretary General for Relief Operations.

The personnel from National Societies were assigned to teams on a multi-national basis. In their first six weeks, the teams, despite improvised working facilities, language difficulties and often working in near-freezing weather, examined nearly two-thirds (6,331 men, women and children) of the paralysed patients as the initial step of the Rehabilitation Programme. The total number of patients ultimately registered was 10,466. Of these, 1,844 were children under 15 years of age. The second group, from fifteen years, number 8,662, of whom 60 % were women.

Hospital Materiel to Launch Programme.—An important amount of hospital materiel was needed to launch the International Rehabilitation Programme. The League's 21st November 1959 Appeal to Member Societies asked urgently, therefore, for 2,400 fully-equipped hospital beds, plus certain amounts of clothing and foodstuffs. Within 45 days, 2,639 hospital beds were contributed and delivered to Morocco; the minimum value placed on this hospital materiel is 1,365,000 Swiss francs. Over 100 tons of the 150 total of equipment and supplies were airlifted. The number of transport planes made available—twenty-five—by the German

Federal Republic, Turkish and U.S. Air Forces, was the largest to take part in an airlift organised under League auspices.

Further equipment and facilities including pools for hydrotherapy were subsequently installed by the Moroccan Government in the five Rehabilitation Centres. After 30th June, the Fez and Meknes Centres will also admit patients of other categories ; Fez will become a National Rehabilitation Centre.

Organisation of Rehabilitation Programme.—The majority of the paralysis victims received treatment on an out-patient basis. A vehicle pick-up service was organised by the Moroccan Ministry of Health for the different Centres ; this included staff to carry to and from vehicles patients who could not walk.

A remarkable relationship sprang up between Red Cross medical staff and the victims. As the paralysed were transferred from one physiotherapist to another for more advanced treatment, the patients insisted on going back to the previous physiotherapists and showing them their progress in gaining further use of hands and feet.

A special Treatment Centre for children was established at Fez in a former Foreign Legion Barracks. For these young victims not only treatment and clothing was provided but also schooling and pre-vocational training.

Originally, the League had planned to terminate its participation in the International Rehabilitation Programme on 30th June 1960 ; before mid-1960, however, the Moroccan Red Crescent and Government requested continuation of the League action until the end of the year. In late October 1960, an urgent request was made by the King of Morocco, the late Mohamed V, for the League's further continuation—until 30th June 1961.

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The importance of the relief work carried out by the League in Morocco was confirmed in a statement made on July 3, 1961, by Dr M. G. Candau, Director-General of the World Health Organisation, in which he said amongst other things :

The completion after eighteen months of the international phase of the rehabilitation programme for Moroccan victims of paralysis due to food-oil poisoning is a cause of satisfaction to all concerned in this undertaking—and in particular the Moroccan Ministry of Health, the League of Red Cross Societies, and the World Health Organisation...

... It is gratifying to think that Morocco will have benefited not only from the rehabilitation of many thousands of citizens who would otherwise have been incapacitated to a greater or less degree, but also from the training given by international experts to Moroccan medical staff who were able to assist the Red Cross personnel and can now take over on their departure and continue giving the long-term treatment still required by certain severe cases.

Great praise is due to the doctors, physiotherapists, nurses and other health staff, most of them provided by Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, who have so unsparingly given their services and have worked alongside the Moroccan health authorities to carry out the programme which is now completed.
