

The United Nations and the application of the Geneva Conventions

A letter from the UNO Secretary-General to the ICRC

Mr. Thant, UNO Secretary-General, replied to a communication which he had received from Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The following are principal extracts from this letter :

I am in entire agreement with you in considering that the Geneva Conventions of 1949 constitute the most complete standards granting to the human person indispensable guarantees for his protection in time of war or in case of armed conflict whatever form it may take. I also wish to confirm that UNO insists on its armed forces in the field applying the principles of these Conventions as scrupulously as possible.

In this connection, you ask whether it would be opportune for the United Nations to issue an official and public statement that it undertakes in all circumstances to respect the Geneva Conventions. In so far as the United Nations Emergency Force is concerned, a formal provision to this effect has been inscribed in article 44 of the regulations drawn up by the Secretary-General in accordance with Resolution 1001 (ES-I) of the General Assembly ; the said article reads as follows :

Respect for the conventions. The members of the Force are bound to respect the principles and the spirit of the general international Conventions relative to the conduct of military personnel.

A similar provision will apply to the United Nations Force in the Congo . . .

Furthermore, the Secretary-General declares himself prepared to co-operate in the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions amongst UNO military personnel in the Congo.

He further states : I am certain that there is no need to specify that all measures envisaged by UNO would have no other object than that of reminding members of its Forces of the principles of the Geneva Conventions and thus to show, without any possible ambiguity, that operations carried out in the name and under the command of the Organization must be in complete accordance with the spirit of the Conventions.

ICRC Mission in Algeria and Tunisia

Continuing its customary activity on behalf of prisoners and detained persons, the International Committee of the Red Cross sent a new mission to Algeria between November 24 and December 16, 1961.

Consisting of Mr. Pierre Gaillard, Mr. Roger Vust and Dr Jean-Louis de Chastonay, this delegation, the ninth since 1955, has just returned to Geneva after having visited 51 places of detention of various categories, including hospitals in which the detained and interned are treated. Sixteen of these visits were made to places in which European activists were detained or interned as a result of the recent events.

As usual, the delegates of the ICRC were everywhere able to speak with detainees of their own choosing or with the representatives appointed by the detainees.

On December 15, the head of the mission verbally submitted his principal observations and suggestions to Mr. Jean Morin, Delegate General of the Government in Algeria, and to General Ailleret, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces. The written report on these visits will be presented to the French Government as soon as possible.

Since it was anxious, however, also to bring its aid to French prisoners held by the " Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic ", the ICRC had, prior to its mission in Algeria, despatched a delegation to Tunis from November 21 to 23, 1961.