

4th Annual Congress of the National Society which was held in Beirut on November 25 at the headquarters of the Lebanese Red Cross. Its theme, which was dealt with by three doctors, was : "Mentally and physically backward children". More than 200 people took part in this most successful event, which included many doctors, presidents of women's associations specializing in medico-social problems, the Central Committee of the Red Cross, the committees of provincial branches, instructresses of various schools and the directors of dispensaries.

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## Rumania

### MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN THE DELTA OF THE DANUBE

*During his visit to Geneva, as has already been pointed out in the International Review of the Red Cross<sup>1</sup>, Mr. A. Moisescu submitted an article to the ICRC on one of the activities of the National Society of which he is President. This article reads as follows :*

After a long journey of nearly 1,800 miles, and traversing seven countries on its course, the Danube falls into the Black Sea forming a delta of incomparable splendour. Migrating birds from Africa, Japan and the shores of South America flock there to make their nests. The river conceals many riches which assure the eating of fish in the interior and their export in large quantities. In its depths, fishermen often make catches supplying caviar weighing from 800 to 1100 lbs.

Twenty years ago there was great misery in the midst of all this beauty and wealth without compare. The Delta was then known as "the cursed land". The fishermen were oppressed by three equally pitiless enemies : the "khekhanadjis", sickness and poverty. The first of these, the owners of fishing gear and boats, had the monopoly

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<sup>1</sup> December 1961.

of all installations and could dispose of the fishermen's lives and of the result of all their work.

Malaria was widespread amongst the inhabitants of the Delta. Between 1938 and 1940 there were no children in some of the villages. When women gave birth they were unable to spare their infants the sufferings caused by that disease. No medical assistance existed and it often happened that sick fishermen, forced by hunger to find food great distances away, slipped into the greedy depths of the Danube to be engulfed for ever. Others, whom sickness did not succeed in striking down, lived miserably in rough hovels dug into the ground, in which the only wealth was a primitive stove and a mattress which served as a bed for the whole family.

Statistics show how hard was the life of fishermen in the Delta of the Danube. Thus, in 1938 only one doctor is listed for nearly 40,000 inhabitants in the Tulcea district. In this region there were fifteen doctors in all who only lived, however, in the small towns of Tulcea and Sulina. The fishermen's hamlets, lost in the country, were abandoned since they were, as described in the statistics, "inaccessible places".

There were scarcely a hundred hospital beds and the inhabitants of the Delta can remember that the only way of taking a sick person to the hospital at Tulcea was by boat, rowing upstream for two days and two nights. The sick person often died before ever reaching the end of the journey. In the archives of the Tulcea hospital more deaths than cures are recorded. As for pharmacies, statistics of that time only mention three for the entire district of Tulcea and these were also situated in the small residential towns. They also indicate a total lack of maternity facilities, dispensaries, day nurseries and other social and medical establishments.

The fishermen of these "inaccessible places" have now had houses built whose flowered windows catch the visitor's eye. In most villages, electricity has been introduced and the shops are as well stocked as in the towns.

*Today there is no longer any malaria in the Danube Delta.* Since 1947 the People's Democratic State has undertaken an active campaign. The best doctors were sent there in order to work on the eradication of malaria. Medical aircraft sprayed the whole

Delta with thousands of tons of insecticide powder in the fight against the anopheles mosquito. Disinterested, fraternal aid was lent us, during this campaign, by the USSR, which placed large numbers of medical aircraft at our disposal.

As and when the medical faculties trained new doctors, the best of these chose to work in the Delta. There are at present in the Tulcea district, 85 doctors, 16 chemists and 450 medical directors of average training. Two new hospitals have been built and at the same time twelve maternity wards, five dispensaries for adults and a dispensary for infants have been established. A pharmaceutical centre provided with all the necessary medicaments operates in each medical district.

Vital statistics show a continual increase in births with a corresponding decrease, unprecedented in the history of the Delta, in adult and infant mortality.

The Red Cross lends valuable support to the medical education of the population, which it trains to put the advice of the medical institutions into practice. It is present in the remotest places in the Delta. There are in the district more than a hundred Red Cross sections. Guided by the sections' committees, many people have attended teamworkers courses and subsequently formed 26 medical groups. More than seven thousand others have attended "Prepared for medical defence" courses. Thus a large voluntary medical entity exists which carries out its activity in each medical district and centre.

It was only after illiteracy had disappeared, as a result of the State's efforts, that the Red Cross was able to train such a large number of people. If there was much illiteracy amongst the men, this applied generally to the women. This is difficult to believe today, when one sees active female members of the Red Cross carrying out medical instruction, giving advice to mothers on the care and feeding of children, or even giving first aid !

Two medical vessels, the *Sanitarul* (The Medical) and the *Sănătatea* (Health) have, for the past three years, watched over the health of the inhabitants of the Delta, and two more will shortly sail on the Danube.

These vessels are equipped with an operating theatre, where urgent cases can be dealt with, a sterilizing room, a stomatologic

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surgery, and a general consulting room for internal diseases and gynaecological complaints. There are Roentgen appliances on board as well as blood for eventual transfusions.

Answering urgent calls, these vessels transport specialist doctors who carry out treatment on the spot, or else ensure the hospitalization of the sick to Tulcea or to Sulina. But urgent cases apart, the ships—on which prophylactic consulting rooms have been established—sail along the villages and fishermen's centres.

More than six thousand consultations were given in 1960 by specialists in medical caravans. Expenses for consultations and medicaments are borne by the State Assistance Office. Furthermore, a cinema operator accompanies the doctors and assures the projection of films on medical subjects and education, as well as on art.

This vast undertaking of medical social assistance, as well as this action of free medical assistance, unique in the history of the Delta, are the results of new medical measures taken by the State. Today nearly eight hundred aged fishermen receive a pension. Furthermore, ever-increasing amounts are allocated each year by the Democratic People's State to meet the social and cultural needs of the Rumanian people. In 1960, for example, 15,199 thousand million lei were allotted for these purposes, of which 4,239 were for the protection of health and social assistance.

Remarkable success favouring the inhabitants of the Delta has not only been achieved in the field of medical assistance and material benefits. Schools have been built in all villages in which the fishermen's children attend the first seven classes of their education. From the 1960-1961 scholastic year they receive, as do all other pupils in the Rumanian People's Republic from the first to the seventh class, free school manuals and it is proposed soon to supply them also with free school materials. There are now six hundred teachers whilst they did not number eighty in 1939. Each fishing village possesses a cultural centre at which films are presented, conferences are held and local artistic talent displays a great activity. There are also well-stocked libraries open to all.

The Danube Delta constantly changes its aspect. Reeds, a natural source of wealth and which were formerly burned, have been developed for the past few years. Once harvested, these are transported to the large cellulose "Combine", recently built at

Chiscani, Braila. Thanks to increased paper production, more and more books dealing with national and world literature as well as technical and scientific works are being produced. For the new way of life in the Rumanian People's Republic requires men to be instructed.

For many years now the Delta is no longer "the cursed land". "Kherkhanadji", malaria and poverty no longer exist. Today this region is known as the "land of man's happiness".

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### Viet Nam

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam has recently had the brief Summary of the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, translated and published in the Vietnamese language.

This is the same booklet which the International Committee of the Red Cross has distributed since 1952 in French, German, English, Arabic and Spanish for the use of members of the armed forces and of the public.

The Red Cross world will have satisfaction in knowing that these basic notions relative to the Geneva Conventions have thus been placed within the reach of the general public in the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

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### Yugoslavia

The Yugoslav Red Cross has been good enough to send the ICRC an illustrated booklet which it has had published<sup>1</sup>. Entitled "The health worker and the Geneva Conventions", and composed of 24 small-format pages, it is intended to popularize and make

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<sup>1</sup> *Zdravstveni radnik i Zenevske Konvencije*, Beograd, 1962.