

**ACCOUNT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE'S  
ACTION IN ALGERIA**

**January 1955 - June 1962**

At a time when Algeria has achieved independence and although the activity of the ICRC is continuing in that country, we consider it to be useful to give a brief account of the International Committee's humanitarian activities carried out in that country from January 1955 to July 1, 1962.

During that period it first of all came to the aid of Moslem Algerians both civilian and military who had been detained or imprisoned in Algeria as well as in France. It did not however limit itself to such activities alone, since circumstances forced it also to assist the civilian population victim of the events, whether refugees, regrouped or repatriated persons.

**I. AID TO PRISONERS AND SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSONS**

Shortly after the disturbances broke out in Algeria the ICRC offered its services to the French Government with a view to exercising its customary humanitarian activity on behalf of the victims of events. This proposal aimed in particular at ICRC delegates visiting camps and prisons in Algeria in order to examine detention conditions of persons prosecuted or interned on account of the events.

a) *On behalf of Algerian prisoners in French hands.*—On February 2, 1955 the French Government complied with the ICRC's request and a first mission went to Algeria on February 28, 1955. Until July 1, 1962 nine missions covered the country, in which they made more than 500 visits to places of detention of various sorts : prisons, screening centres, internment camps, etc.

Mention should here be made as to how these visits are generally effected : the delegates have first of all a meeting with the director or the commandant of the establishment who supplies them with a certain amount of information about detention conditions. The delegates then visit the buildings and installations : cells, dormitories, kitchens, showers, latrines, etc. They then note during talks without witnesses with the prisoners or their representatives, remarks, requests and possible complaints, which these might have to make concerning their conditions of detention.

Visits end with a final discussion with the camp commandant. The delegates inform him of their observations ; they make, if necessary, suggestions with a view to remedying any shortcomings which they may have observed and examine with him the possibility of satisfying demands which seem to them to be justified.

Since 1958 this assistance to detainees was extended to France where the ICRC delegates made about one hundred visits to places of detention under similar conditions.

On the termination of each of the missions, the International Committee handed a report to the French Government in which was a detailed account of the observations made by the delegates and precise suggestions for improving, when they considered this desirable, the conditions of detention. Following on this continuous action by the ICRC considerable improvements were made, after each mission, to internment conditions and especially by the adopting of special penal treatment for political detainees, in the autumn of 1961.

During the course of their visits, the delegates distributed various relief supplies to the detainees to a value of about 240,000 Swiss francs : books, instructional matter, games, cigarettes, clothing, blankets, medicaments, etc.

b) *On behalf of missing Algerian Moslems.*—Besides visiting camps and prisons and throughout the whole of the Algerian conflict, the permanent ICRC delegation in Algeria made ceaseless representations to trace Moslems missing during the events. At its request, hundreds of enquiries were opened by the French authorities.

c) *On behalf of activists detained in Algeria and in France.*—Since 1961, the ICRC also occupied itself with the fate of interned or imprisoned activists in Algeria as well as in France. To date 26

such visits have been made, 10 of which were during a special mission in Algeria, in June 1962.

Reports on visits made by the ICRC also put this action in concrete form with the French Government.

d) *On behalf of French prisoners in the hands of the ALN.*—Anxious to bring its customary aid also to French civilians and military captured by the ALN, the ICRC established first contacts at the beginning of 1956 with the representatives of the “Algerian National Liberation Front” in Cairo. It asked them if the Red Cross could receive and transmit family news of prisoners and visit French prisoners held by the ALN; these representations were continued in Morocco and Tunisia in 1957.

A first concrete result was obtained at the beginning of 1958: a delegate of the ICRC was able to visit four prisoners captured in the region of Sakiët-Sidi-Youssef (Tunisian frontier). The ICRC delegate also obtained from the ALN representatives a list of ten names of French prisoners to which nine further names were subsequently added. On October 20, 1958, the four prisoners mentioned above were released unconditionally at the headquarters of the Algerian Red Crescent in Tunis and handed over to the delegates of the ICRC.

Other releases took place in 1958 and 1959, sometimes in the presence of ICRC delegates. At the end of 1959 their number reached a total of 71, of which 51 were military and 20 civilians.

However, in spite of numerous requests for information made to the GPRA and to the Algerian Red Crescent in Tunis, further releases only took place after the “cease fire”. In May and June 1962 about ten French military were released in Tunis, Tizi-Ouzou and Rabat, as well as some twenty Foreign Legionaries who were immediately repatriated.

At the present moment the ICRC is continuing its representations to obtain the news of 594 missing, namely 330 military and 264 civilians, and especially of 36 French military whose capture had at one time or another been confirmed by the ALN during the course of the Algerian conflict.

e) *On behalf of European civilians kidnapped after the “cease fire”.*—Between the Evian Agreements on March 19, 1962 and

Algerian self-determination on July 1, 1962, the number of disappearances reported to the ICRC, chiefly Europeans, reached a figure of 450. At the end of 1962 the total number of such cases to be reported to the ICRC amounted to 923.

The ICRC made pressing representations with the President of the provisional executive and launched several appeals on the French and Arabic channels of Radio-Algiers in order to obtain news of these missing persons. Although a certain number of persons being sought have been released during the past few weeks, these appeals have for the most remained unanswered and the question continues seriously to preoccupy the ICRC and its delegation in Algeria, to which the families concerned send moving and urgent requests.

## II. ACTION ON BEHALF OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATIONS VICTIMS OF THE EVENTS

Prisoners, however, were not the only persons to benefit for ICRC aid in the Algerian conflict. The Geneva institution also concerned itself in the fate of civilian populations which had suffered through the war, namely in 1957 and 1958, refugees in Tunisia and Morocco, then since 1957, populations regrouped in the interior of Algeria.

a) *Assistance to Algerian refugees in Morocco and Tunisia.*—In the spring of 1957, the problem of Algerian refugees in Morocco and Tunisia became one of considerable importance.

The International Committee sent six missions to Morocco and three to Tunisia to go to the aid of these victims to whom relief supplies to a value of 3,320,202 Swiss francs were distributed by its delegates in the shape of flour, barley, semolina, tea, sardines, oil, sugar, condensed milk, blankets and clothing. This relief was partly provided from donations by certain National Red Cross Societies.

After the creation of the Red Crescent Societies in Tunisia and Morocco, the relief action was continued in 1958 by them with the support of the League of Red Cross Societies. Later the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees undertook a sustained effort on behalf of Algerian refugees, assisted by the League of Red

Cross Societies ; this action resulted in the repatriation of the refugees to Algeria to whom aid is still being given on the spot.

b) *On behalf of the regrouped populations in Algeria.*—In 1957 delegates of the ICRC in Algeria distributed emergency relief to the populations regrouped by reason of the events in the interior of Algeria. These actions chiefly concerned the regions of Bordj Arréridj, Kessabia, Aïn Hamiane and Dupérré.

Then in 1959, following on the considerable increase in the number of regrouped persons (which reached a figure of 2,200,000 in 1960) the ICRC, in co-operation with the French Red Cross, undertook an action of greater importance. Thanks to the support of mobile nursing teams and of the local committees of the French Red Cross in Algeria, relief supplies consisting of milk, tonics, medicaments, soap, clothing and blankets were distributed to women and children in regroupment centres in which there was the most distress.

This action was extended in 1960 thanks to gifts from the National Red Cross Societies and especially to a considerable amount of surplus dairy produce made available by the Swiss and Netherlands Governments.

By July 1, 1962 the value of relief sent by the ICRC to Algeria for the regrouped populations reached a total of 2,144,370 Swiss francs.

c) *Aid to Algerian war disabled in Morocco.*—Since 1957 the ICRC has given its aid to Algerian war disabled in Morocco and Tunisia, in the shape of artificial limbs for the amputated and artificial eyes. Funds devoted to this action reached an amount of 19,000 francs and enabled 217 persons to be supplied with artificial limbs.

d) *ICRC emergency medical action in Algeria.*—In May 1962, serious disturbances which broke out in the large towns in Algeria seriously affected the health organisation and conditions in the Moslem quarters of Algiers and Oran.

The Algerian provisional Executive requested the ICRC for its aid during the emergency period. This aid took the form of the despatch of medicaments, plasma and blood transfusion equipment

as well as half-skim milk for infants, to a value of 115,000 francs, but above all by the sending of four doctors and one male nurse. One of the doctors established himself in Algiers, another in Relizane and the two others in Oran where in particular they set up a blood transfusion centre.

The French, Swiss, Italian and Swedish Red Cross Societies gave their support to the ICRC's emergency action during this period by despatching medicaments, plasma or by making personnel available.

e) *Aid to French settlers repatriated to France.*—When large numbers of French nationals who had settled in Algeria were streaming back to France, bodies concerned with assistance to the repatriated approached the ICRC on several occasions with a view to obtaining its aid. In principle, assistance to this category of persons rests with the French authorities and Red Cross. But in order to enable a certain number of children badly shaken by terrorism to find peace and quiet, the Swiss Red Cross, at the ICRC's suggestion, has accepted to invite several hundred children of repatriated persons to Switzerland during the holiday season. This action is being organised jointly with the French Red Cross.

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Since July 1, 1962, the International Committee has maintained a delegation of four persons in Algeria, whose object it is to continue its assistance to Algerian or European civilians suffering from the effects of the war and the recent disturbances. This delegation, which has made official contact with the new government, will also have the task of helping the Red Crescent Society which is being organised in Algeria.

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