

The Meetings of the International Red Cross in Prague

Board of Governors. — It is for the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies, in its own publications, to report on the 26th session of its Board of Governors, which was held in Prague from September 30 to October 7, 1961, under the chairmanship of Mr. John MacAulay, and to comment on the numerous decisions which were made on this occasion.

For its part, the International Committee, which as usual had been kindly invited to send observers to these League meetings, will confine itself to presenting below the wording of the two resolutions adopted at the proposal of the Yugoslav Red Cross, both of them referring to aid to the victims of internal disturbances. The International Committee finds a definite encouragement and support for the work which it unceasingly develops on behalf of this category of persons.

The Board of Governors,

considering that the victims of armed conflicts not of an international character are not always adequately protected,

considering that the rôle of the Red Cross is to work for the implementation and improvement of protection of victims of armed conflicts,

bearing in mind the resolutions of previous sessions of the International Conference of the Red Cross, especially Resolution No. XIV of the XVth

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Conference and Resolutions Nos. XVII and XIX of the XIXth Conference, demanding efficient application of the humanitarian principles to the victims of these conflicts,

requests the International Committee of the Red Cross to study, in co-operation with the National Societies and with regard in particular to Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions, the means of improving the legal protection of victims concerned as well as the problem of their relief,

also requests the International Committee of the Red Cross to submit a report on this question, as well as all suitable proposals, to the next International Conference of the Red Cross.

The Board of Governors,

considering that it is the rôle of the Red Cross to work for the alleviation of suffering among the victims of all kinds of armed conflicts, by work directed towards the extension of humanitarian law as well as by practical action in the form of immediate assistance to these victims,

considering that the preparation of drafts for the extension of humanitarian law in respect of the victims of so-termed internal conflicts and the approval of these drafts will take a certain time, namely several years,

considering that we are at the present time witnessing great suffering among the victims of conflicts in various countries, as for example in Algeria, the Congo and Angola, and that these victims cannot await the new provisions of humanitarian law since the situation calls for urgent action,

appeals to the parties concerned to observe immediately the humanitarian principles recognized by all nations and

calls upon the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the National Societies concerned to use their authority, prestige and resources so that the suffering of these victims, be they refugees, regrouped displaced persons or others, may be alleviated as speedily as possible.

Council of delegates. — The Council of Delegates, which groups the constituent elements of the International Red Cross, that is, the International Committee, the League and the National Societies, met on October 3 and 5, 1961. It is an entirely different body from the Board of Governors. Numerous delegates from 62 National Societies filled the vast Conference hall of the Hôtel International in Prague. As a rule, the Council of Delegates meets shortly before each International Conference of the Red Cross, in order to settle questions of procedure. This was the first time that it met during the interval between two Conferences and dealt with fundamental

questions. This meeting was therefore of particular importance. The fact that it had been considered necessary to convene the Council was because certain questions were to be decided upon which concerned primarily the International Committee. The undertaking proved to be most encouraging.

The Council of Delegates was opened by Mr. A. François-Poncet, Chairman of the Standing Commission, and presided over by Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The first and most important question concerned the adoption of a Declaration of the fundamental Principles of the Red Cross. As will be remembered, following the publication of Mr. Jean S. Pictet's book *Red Cross Principles*, the wish was expressed in various quarters for a concise and systematic official declaration of the doctrine governing our institution. In this connection, we should like to add that the *Revue internationale* has on several occasions referred to the standing which Mr. Pictet's book enjoys in many countries. It has now been translated into five languages and various National Red Cross Societies have based their documentary material and reports on it. In Japan, for instance, the Junior Red Cross use it as a guide for its action and efforts to popularize the Geneva Conventions.

The Standing Commission had therefore appointed a Working Party consisting of representatives of the International Committee and the League to prepare a draft of an official declaration of doctrine. Subsequently, after taking into due consideration the opinions expressed by the National Societies, the Commission decided on the wording of this declaration, which was submitted to the Council of Delegates.

The discussion opened with a detailed report by Mr. A. François-Poncet and was lively and even heated. However, a fine spirit of conciliation and mutual understanding, as well as noble thought, reigned throughout the debates, so that this important text was finally voted unanimously. The XXth International Conference of the Red Cross — which will be held in Geneva in 1963 on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary — will be called upon to give this declaration its final approval, the purport of which is as follows :

RED CROSS PRINCIPLES

- Humanity** *The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours — in its international and national capacity — to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peacing amongst all peoples.*
- Impartiality** *It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.*
- Neutrality** *In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.*
- Independence** *The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles.*
- Voluntary Service** *The Red Cross is a voluntary relief organization not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.*
- Unity** *There can be only one Red Cross Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.*
- Universality** *The Red Cross is a world-wide institution in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other.*

The other items on the agenda also aroused keen interest and gave rise to statements from delegations from all parts of the world.

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The need has been felt for some time to set up a ruling concerning the use of the red cross sign by the National Societies. The Geneva Conventions provide no more than a few fundamental rules. As far as details are concerned, the use of the emblem varies considerably from country to country and a large degree of doubt continues to reign. In Prague the International Committee presented the first outline of a complete ruling on the use of the red cross sign. This draft will be given a final version at the Conference of 1963, after the National Societies have been called upon to express their opinions on the subject and after the question has been more thoroughly examined. This is the wording of the resolution passed on this item :

The Council of Delegates,

having studied the reports submitted by the South African Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross on the employment of the Red Cross emblem by National Societies, as well as the opinions expressed by delegates of the National Societies,

considers it desirable, as do the authors of these reports, to establish standard regulations which will permit all National Societies and their members to use the signs of the red cross, red crescent or red lion and sun in accordance with international stipulations,

invites National Societies to acquaint the International Committee of the Red Cross with their experiences and views in this connection, and

invites the International Committee of the Red Cross, together with the League, to prepare detailed draft regulations on the use of the emblem for submission to the next International Conference of the Red Cross.

Let us pass on to another question. As we all know, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 have not yet ensured complete and adequate protection for civilian medical and hospital personnel. Several years ago, therefore, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Medical Association and the International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy called together a working party, which drew up draft regulations in this connection. This same working party recommended the use of a very ancient symbol, the staff of Aesculapius, red on a white ground, in order to designate civilian doctors and members of the civilian hospital personnel who are not entitled to wear the red cross sign. Perhaps the means has

thus been found to put an end to the abuses to which the red cross emblem was always exposed.

The results of this work were submitted to the Council of Delegates, which passed the following resolution :

The Council of Delegates,

recognizing the need of ensuring for the medical professions the free exercise of their duties in time of conflict of internal disturbances, and recognizing, moreover, the value which a special distinctive sign, which could be the staff of Aesculapius, red on a white ground, would have for the members of this personnel,

approves the report on this matter submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross,

recommends the National Societies to approach, together with the medical organizations of their countries, their Governments in order to obtain the implementation at the proposals contained therein,

calls upon the National Societies to report on the measures taken in this connection in their countries at the next International Conference of the Red Cross,

requests the International Committee of the Red Cross to continue to study this very important problem with the help of experts and to report to the next International Conference of the Red Cross.

A further item which held the attention of the Council of Delegates concerned the co-operation of the National Red Cross Societies in the so-called Civil Defence services. The National Societies are often called upon to provide the necessary hospital personnel for these Civil Defence services. This gives rise to new ties of co-operation between these Societies and their Governments. However, the National Red Cross Societies must nonetheless retain their autonomy, individuality and their right to wear the red cross sign. The Irish Red Cross requested that this question be entered on the agenda and a joint report was prepared by the International Committee and the League in this connection. Finally, at the proposal of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic and the Swiss Red Cross, the following resolution was adopted:

The Council of Delegates

recognizing the importance of the problem raised by the Irish Red Cross in its memorandum on the co-operation of National Red Cross Societies in Civil Defence,



*Opening address at the Board of Governors, given by Dr. Frantisek Janouch,
President of the Czechoslovak Red Cross.*

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*A session of the Standing Commission presided over
by Mr. A. François-Poncé*



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having also considered the joint report submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies on this subject,

- 1) *confirms that the co-operation of National Red Cross Societies in government efforts aiming at protecting the civilian population in the event of an armed conflict constitutes a natural task for these Societies and is in keeping with the principles of the Red Cross ;*
- 2) *recommends that the National Societies — in the agreements concluded with the authorities of their countries for establishing the scope and terms of their participation in Civil Defence — endeavour to lay down conditions which will enable their personnel participating in this defence to be clearly recognizable as Red Cross personnel, and to maintain the necessary ties with their National Society ;*
- 3) *voices the wish that the International Committee of the Red Cross may actively continue its work in view of strengthening, within international humanitarian law, the immunity of non-military Civil Defence bodies, in particular by means of the adoption of a standard distinctive sign.*

All these resolutions, which for the most part were adopted unanimously, will enable the international bodies of the Red Cross, and in particular the International Committee, to actively continue their efforts for aiding and enlarging still further the activities of the world-wide Red Cross movement on behalf of mankind.

Other meetings. — With the friendly agreement of the League, the International Committee held an information meeting on October 5. A large audience attended this meeting, which was presided over by Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee. After Mr. F. Siordet, member of the Committee, had reminded the listeners of the principles governing the International Committee's action and the circumstances in which it is called upon to act, Mr. R. Gallopin, Executive Director, outlined the main tasks on which the Committee is engaged at the present moment, in particular the Algerian and Laotian conflicts and those of the Congo and Bizerta. Finally, Mr. J. Pictet, Director for General Affairs, insisted on the necessity of the widest possible distribution of the Geneva Conventions. He also urgently appealed to the National Societies to ensure that the new means of information which the Committee now has at its disposal — for example,

the English edition of the *Revue internationale* and the *Information Notes* — be as widely distributed as possible and in particular that each local Red Cross branch receives copies.

The Standing Commission of the International Red Cross, for its part, met in Prague under the chairmanship of Mr. A. François-Poncet¹. It gave its full approval of the first draft agenda for the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross (Geneva, 1963). The main theme of this Conference, which will be held on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary and will be of particular importance, could be at the same time: "A hundred years in the service of mankind" and "The Red Cross on the threshold of its second century". Indeed, if the Conference can assess the extent of the work already accomplished, it must also look ahead, in Henry Dunant's spirit, and ask itself how this work can be carried out better and more extensively in the future.

Various other committees took the opportunity offered them by the Board of Governors' meeting and also met in Prague: the Health Advisory Committee, Centenary Committee and the Advisory Committee of the Junior Red Cross.

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The organization of the meetings was perfect from all points of view. All the delegates were given a particularly kind and generous welcome by the Czechoslovak authorities and Red Cross, and will not easily forget the pleasant and profitable days they spent in the fine capital of the country where this year's meetings were held.

¹ *Plate*