

THE RED CROSS AND REFUGEES

Under this title, on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary, the United Nations High Commissioner's Office for Refugees has just published an illustrated booklet of some thirty pages which begins with a message by Mr. Felix Schnyder. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dedicates this publication to all members of the Red Cross "with the gratitude of millions of refugees for whom the emblem of the Red Cross will always remain the symbol of man's humanity to man."

The *International Review* in its June 1961 number, published a study of the work of the Red Cross for refugees. However, it feels it must draw its readers' attention to this initiative on the part of the High Commissioner's Office.

The introduction to the collection emphasizes the pioneer rôle of the Red Cross, and especially of the International Committee of the Red Cross, in aiding refugees. We quote :

"The centenary of the foundation of the Red Cross, being commemorated throughout the world during 1963, not only marks a milestone in the evolution of the Red Cross movement, but also highlights its diversity, its universality, and its unity of thought and purpose. Transcending differences of race, nationality, religious beliefs, political opinion and interests, the actions taken by the Red Cross have alleviated much suffering, and have saved the lives of millions of men, women and children throughout a frequently strife-torn world. In the pursuit of these tasks, the Red Cross makes no distinction between the victims of natural or man-made disasters, but takes suffering and need as the basic criteria for its assistance.

By tradition, the Red Cross acts in emergency situations ; it withdraws from the scene once immediate needs are met, and organized national or intergovernmental machinery can take its place. Not surprisingly therefore, refugees, in the fullest sense of the word, have for long benefited from Red Cross actions. On many

occasions, when a large-scale refugee exodus took place with dramatic suddenness, the Red Cross, with its historic impartiality, could act long before concerted intergovernmental action could be undertaken. It is still doing so."

The booklet reminds us that the creation of a High Commissioner, charged with directing international aid on behalf of refugees, was the result of an initiative on the part of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We now give the text as published by the official gazette of the League of Nations of the letter addressed on February 20, 1921 by Gustave Ador to the President of the League of Nations.¹

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to confirm the following telegram which was sent to the Council of the League of Nations :—

" On the occasion of the Meeting of the Council, I beg you, on behalf of the International Red Cross Committee, to convey to the Council the gratitude of the International Committee for the great work which you have done to enable us to bring the repatriation of prisoners to a satisfactory conclusion. Thanks to the energy and devotion of your Commissioner, Dr. Nansen, the problem is now almost solved and all the prisoners are on their way homeward. This magnificent success encourages us to submit to you a fresh proposal, which you will find more fully treated in a memorandum drawn up by the International Committee after consultation with the most important organisations which are already taking part in relief work amongst Russian refugees. Among the most important of these, the magnificent effort of the French Government, that of the American Red Cross and of the International Union for Helping the Children are worthy of special mention.

" In begging you to be good enough to discuss at your present meeting the possible appointment of a League of Nations Commissioner for the Russian refugees, the International Committee is well aware that it is not so much a humanitarian duty which calls for the generous activities of the League of Nations as an obligation of international justice. The eight hundred thousand Russian refugees scattered throughout Europe are without legal protection or representation. All the organisations already at work would be glad to put forth fresh efforts under the general supervision of a Commissioner appointed by the League of Nations, which is the only supra-national political authority capable of solving a problem which is beyond the power of exclusively humanitarian organisations.

" We bring to your notice with gratitude the successful steps already taken by the International Labour Office and the generous response of Brazil.

The International Committee is fully confident that the decision of the Council, in view of the urgent nature of the problem, will provide the encouragement which is so anxiously awaited by those who have based their hope upon its august intervention.

(Signed) ADOR.

President of the International Red Cross."

Since then the name of Nansen has become to a certain extent the symbol of the international work of relief to refugees.

The Second World War having displaced entire populations under often tragic conditions, international mutual aid extended itself in hitherto unknown proportions.

Once again the Red Cross thus had the opportunity of cooperating with the United Nations to aid persons in distress.

¹ Original French Text as follows :

Monsieur le Président,

J'ai l'honneur de vous confirmer le télégramme adressé au Conseil de la Société des Nations en ces termes :

« A l'occasion de la réunion du Conseil vous prie au nom du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge de transmettre au Conseil la reconnaissance du Comité international pour le grand effort accompli pour nous permettre de mener à bonne fin l'œuvre du rapatriement des prisonniers. Grâce à l'énergie et au grand cœur de votre Commissaire le D^r Nansen le problème est aujourd'hui à peu près résolu et tous les prisonniers sont sur la voie du retour. Ce magnifique succès nous encourage à vous soumettre une proposition nouvelle que vous trouverez développée dans un mémorandum établi par le Comité international après consultation des plus grandes organisations déjà actives dans l'œuvre de secours aux réfugiés russes, au premier rang desquelles il faut signaler l'effort magnifique du Gouvernement français, celui de la Croix-Rouge américaine et celui de l'Union internationale de Secours aux enfants. En vous priant de bien vouloir discuter dans votre session actuelle la nomination possible d'un commissaire de la Société des Nations pour les réfugiés russes, le Comité international est conscient que ce n'est pas tant une œuvre humanitaire qui s'offre à l'activité généreuse de la Société des Nations qu'un devoir de justice internationale, les huit cent mille réfugiés russes répandus dans l'Europe entière étant sans protection et représentation légales. Toutes les organisations déjà au travail seraient heureuses de faire de nouveaux efforts sous la direction générale d'un Commissaire de la Société des Nations, seule autorité politique supranationale pouvant résoudre un problème qui dépasse les compétences des organisations uniquement humanitaires. Nous vous signalons avec gratitude les démarches déjà entreprises avec succès par le Bureau International du Travail et la réponse si généreuse du Brésil. Le Comité international est pleinement confiant que la décision du Conseil tenant compte de l'urgence du problème donnera l'encouragement tant attendu à tous ceux qui ont mis leur espoir dans sa haute intervention.

(Signé) ADOR,

Président du Comité international Croix-Rouge.

Mention is made of the primordial rôle of the ICRC and the League in the relief action resulting from the dispersion of the Palestine Arabs, following on the 1948 conflicts. In Hungary in 1956-57, the League played a primary rôle in aiding the Hungarian refugees. Then the Algerian conflict and the troubles which broke out in other African countries, notably in the Congo, necessitated further relief action organized by the Red Cross.

Thus, as the booklet reveals, ever closer co-operation was established between the High Commissioner's Office and the various Red Cross institutions, a co-operation from which many thousands of refugees have benefited in the most varied regions of the world.

During the course of a brief ceremony which took place at the Palais des Nations, on May 16, 1963, Mr. Felix Schnyder presented the first copies of the publication to Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the ICRC and to Mr. Henrik Beer, Secretary-General of the League. In thanking the High Commissioner, the two representatives of the International Red Cross praised the most useful co-operation existing between the High Commissioner's Office and their institutions.

The *International Review* has pleasure in associating itself with these thanks by drawing the attention of the Red Cross world to this publication. The numerous illustrations most felicitously enliven the text.

H. C.