

NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Formerly: International Bulletin of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1869

Austria

Second Seminar on the Geneva Conventions

The Austrian Red Cross is continuing its efforts to ensure the dissemination and knowledge of the Geneva Conventions. It is paying particular attention to making them known in official circles and by senior officials of the various ministries.

In 1960, it took the initiative in organising a seminar for the study of the four Conventions of 1949, to which the ICRC was invited to send a lecturer. The *Revue internationale* reported this seminar, which aroused a great deal of interest.¹

Encouraged by the success of the first seminar, the Austrian Red Cross convened a second and similar meeting, which was held at the National Society's headquarters in Vienna, on May 18 and 19, 1962. The ICRC was asked to play an even more important part than at the first one, and this year, two lecturers went to Austria, Mr. Jean S. Pictet, Director for General Affairs, and Mr. J. P. Schoenholzer, a member of the Legal Department. On the Austrian side the lecturers were Mr. Kirchschräger, doctor of laws, Minister Extraordinary and Envoy Plenipotentiary, from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Fr. Wendl, doctor of laws and Austrian Red Cross lawyer. Mr. Kirchschräger examined, on the highest level, the importance which the Geneva Conventions held for Austria and the rôle which this country could play within the sphere of their application. Mr. Wendl, who dealt with the Conventions, is among the finest specialists in humanitarian law in Europe.

¹ See *Revue internationale*, May 1960.

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There were about thirty people taking part in this course, all of them lawyers or senior officials of the Government and the National Society. They were extremely interested in the lectures given and they took an active part in the debates which followed each one.

Here is the detailed programme of the seminar :

Friday May 18, 1962

- 9 a.m. Opening and speech of welcome by the President of the Austrian Red Cross, Mr. Lauda
- 9.15 a.m. to 10.15 a.m. *The development of international humanitarian law*, by Mr. J. S. Pictet
- 10.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. *The Geneva Conventions and their significance for Austria*, by Mr. Kirchschräger
- 11.30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Discussion
- 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. *Systematic presentation of the Geneva Conventions*, by Mr. F. Wendl
- 4.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. *The organisation and activities of the ICRC*, by Mr. J. P. Schoenholzer

Saturday May 19, 1962

- 8.30 a.m. to 10 a.m. *The IVth Geneva Convention and its provisions for application*, by Mr. J. P. Schoenholzer
- 10.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. *Civil Defence and the law of nations*, by Mr. R. J. Wilhelm, Adviser, Legal Department of the ICRC, report read by Mr. J. P. Schoenholzer
- 11.30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Discussion
- 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. *The reason for the Austrian law protecting the Red Cross emblem*, by Mr. F. Wendl
- 3.15 p.m. to 4 p.m. *The doctrine of the Red Cross*, by Mr. J. S. Pictet.

This seminar, like the first, was a great success and credit for this must be given to the Austrian Red Cross, which organised it, and in particular to its eminent and active Secretary-General, Mr. Hans Sevcik.

This initiative, which must be compared with a similar initiative which we are also describing in the current number and which was taken by the Yugoslav Red Cross, merits the greatest encouragement and should be a source of inspiration to all National Societies. It constitutes a particularly effective means of drawing the attention of the responsible organs of State and the National Societies to the essential rules of the Geneva Conventions and to the obligations which these impose.

It should be pointed out that this seminar has already produced certain results of which the Austrian Red Cross has recently informed the ICRC. To take one example : the Austrian Defence Ministry has asked the National Red Cross to publish an edition of the Geneva Conventions and to comment on them, and it has ordered 40,000 copies of this for itself.

Indonesia

During his recent stay in Djakarta, the ICRC delegate, Mr. Vibert, obtained information which gives a vivid picture of the very fine job of work which the Red Cross is doing over a varied field of action.

Circumstances oblige the Indonesian Red Cross to be continually undertaking relief actions. During the last few years it has had to intervene either following natural disasters or to try and cope with the after-effects of the civil war by distributing foodstuffs and clothing.

The volcano of Merapi, in the centre of the Island of Java, erupted in April 1961 and then large areas of the country were devastated by floods.¹

¹ *Plate.*