

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE AND THE REUNITING OF FAMILIES

Since the end of the Second World War, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been carrying out a non-stop action to reunite or to help to reunite members of families scattered by war or as a result of events which have taken place in Europe or other continents. The *International Review* has devoted several articles to this problem, the tragic character of which is all too evident <sup>1</sup>.

This action, carried out in close co-operation with the National Red Cross Societies concerned, has had good results to date. In fact, it is estimated that nearly five hundred thousand people have been able to find their relations, cut off from them by frontiers. Most of them, about four hundred and thirty thousand, have remained in Europe and the rest have resettled in other continents.

The majority of the families reunited in Europe are persons of German origin who, thanks to the understanding of the authorities and with the help of the Red Cross Societies concerned, have been able to leave various countries of Eastern and South Eastern Europe for West Germany, Austria and other Western countries. In the opposite direction, some thousands of these Germans, or "Volksdeutsche", have moved from West to East.

The ICRC would like to place on record its gratitude to the authorities and the National Red Cross Societies which have made this action possible. In order to instigate further resettlements, it launched the following appeal, last November:

*As a result of conflicts and tensions prevailing in different parts of the world, many families are still dispersed. The desperate efforts they attempt to become reunited by their own initiative end only too often in tragedy.*

*During the past twelve years the International Committee of the Red Cross has actively contributed towards re-establishing the union*

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, April 1960, p. 196 and November 1961, p. 431.

*of many dismembered families. Thus about five hundred thousand persons, in possession of all the necessary permits, have been able to traverse frontiers which had hitherto been closed to them, and to find their own close relatives once more, thanks to the understanding shown by National Red Cross Societies and the governments concerned. Several tens of thousands of other persons, however, are waiting to be able to do the same and their requests flow in daily to the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross.*

*No one should remain indifferent to the suffering caused by such separation. The ICRC therefore seized the opportunity offered by the recent meetings in Geneva to examine this question with the delegations of several National Red Cross Societies. Together they tried to find ways in which the Red Cross could bring a practical contributions towards solving this problem, chiefly in cases of those countries which do not maintain diplomatic relations with each other.*

*Basing itself on the results which have already been achieved in several countries, the ICRC appeals to the competent authorities to take concrete measures in favour of the reuniting of dispersed families in a place of their own choice.*

*In the meantime, or failing such a regrouping taking place, towards which all efforts should essentially tend, the International Committee suggests that members of the same family, who express their desire to do so, be authorized to meet each other at regular intervals at a place to be decided upon, each one then returning whence he came. The ICRC offers its services to the appropriate authorities to study methods for the realization of these meetings.*

*By making this appeal, the International Committee of the Red Cross is speaking for men, women and children separated from those closest to them, who no longer intend remaining the innocent victims of disagreements for which they can in no way be held responsible.*

The International Committee is continuing to take the appropriate steps wherever families are separated as a result of armed conflicts or political tension <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See *International Review*, December 1962, p. 662.