

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE IN THE YEMEN

A mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross has recently stayed in Sanaa. This is the first time that representatives of the ICRC have visited the capital of the Yemen, where they were given a warm and friendly welcome.

The delegates of the ICRC, Mr. Roger Du Pasquier and Mr. Joseph Gasser, were received by Marshal Abdallah Sallal, President of the Arab Republic of the Yemen, who undertook to have the principles of the Geneva Conventions respected. The Chief of State in principle agreed to transmit to Geneva lists of prisoners taken by his troops.

The delegates had lengthy discussions with other representatives of the Yemeni authorities, to whom they handed documentation on the Geneva Conventions. They visited the hospital of Sanaa in which treatment was given to a certain number of men wounded during the course of the military operations. They also had the opportunity of visiting several political detainees undergoing treatment at the hospital, amongst whom was a former Minister of the Royal Government.

The ICRC's mission in Sanaa also had as its object that of making contact with the Red Crescent Society of the Yemen, which has just been constituted¹. The delegates had a number of talks with Mr. Mohamed Abdel Wasaa Hamid, Director General of the Society, whom they documented on the universal movement of the Red Cross, its principles and organization, and he showed real enthusiasm for the humanitarian ideals of the institution. The President of the Society is Mr. Ali Mohamed Saïd, Minister of Health; local branches are in the process of formation at Taiz and Hodeida. A first collection of funds for the youthful Red Crescent has already given most encouraging results.

¹ *Plate.*

One of the mission's most important aims was to collect information on the urgent relief supplies, especially of a medical nature, which the Yemeni Republic hoped to receive by reason of the present events. In this connection the delegates observed that whilst there was an adequate number of doctors, there often existed an acute shortage of pharmaceutical products and medical equipment. They brought back with them to Geneva a list of medicaments and equipment which the Sanaa authorities hoped would be rapidly despatched, in order to be able to care for the more numerous victims of the fighting in the northern and eastern areas of the country.

During the course of their mission, the delegates stopped in Cairo, where they had cordial talks with Mr. Asfahany, Secretary-General, and with other leading members of the Red Crescent of the United Arab Republic. They also called at Aden, where they were welcomed by the local branch of the British Red Cross.

Meanwhile the ICRC has continued its contacts with the Royalist Yemeni authorities opposed to the Republican regime in Sanaa, with a view to bringing medical assistance to the wounded on the northern frontiers of the Yemen. After the first mission of the two representatives of the ICRC, Dr. Rubli and Dr. Pidermann, who had gone at the end of December to the Yemen¹—Saudi Arabian border to assess the amount of needs, a further mission proceeded to Saudi Arabia, where it made contact with Prince Abderrahman ben Yahya, a cousin of the Imam El Badr, with Mr. Ahmed El Shami, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and other representatives of the Royalist Government. The Yemeni personalities who conversed with the ICRC delegates, confirmed their intention to transmit to Geneva the customary information regarding prisoners captured in the fighting. This mission, which consisted of Mr. Pierre Gaillard, delegate, Dr. Bruno Beretta, doctor, and Mr. Ibrahim Zreikat, interpreter, studied the possibility of sending medical teams to the Royalist forces of the Yemen, which have hitherto been entirely devoid of medical services. The delegates for the ICRC also had talks with Mr. Omar Sakkaf, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, who promised to grant all the necessary facilities to the Red Cross mission.

¹ See *International Review*, February 1963.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Dr. Beretta subsequently went to Najran, a village in Saudi Arabia, near the Yemen frontier, in which a hospital is located. He was accompanied by Dr. Mahmoud Amr, of the Jordan Red Crescent, a Society which is considering supplying a medical team.

*

Following on these various missions, the ICRC has just sent out to several Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, an appeal on behalf of the victims of the present conflict in the Yemen. The appeal is aimed at obtaining the co-operation of a certain number of medical teams which might intervene on the Royalist side. It also asks for contributions, financial or in kind, in order to be able to have sorely needed medicaments and medical equipment reach the Republican side. The ICRC proposes to send a further mission to Sanaa in order to assure the distribution of this relief.

*

This intervention by the ICRC in the Arabian peninsular marks an important date in the history of the Red Cross movement. In fact until now Saudi Arabia and the Yemen were amongst the very few countries of the world which had not acceded to the Geneva Conventions and did not possess a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. Now, not only does a Red Crescent exist henceforth in the Yemen, but during the course of the ICRC missions, both Marshal Sallal as well as the Imam El Badr have declared their willingness to respect the principles of the Conventions. Furthermore, the Emir Faisal, Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, also expressed to the representatives of the ICRC his intention to accede to the Geneva Conventions and to form a Red Crescent Society in his country. Thus, one blank which hitherto existed on the world Red Cross map is in the process of being filled in.