

ICRC Action in Cyprus

General situation

ICRC action in Cyprus has developed considerably since the end of the second phase of hostilities, as new human problems have arisen.

At the end of September, the ICRC delegation consisted of 47 persons—including 14 delegates, 6 medical delegates and 8 Agency delegates. Their work had increased considerably, in providing protection and assistance to prisoners and to the civilian population.

The ICRC had supplied material assistance, in addition to that provided by the authorities, to more than 150,000 Greek Cypriot displaced persons, concentrated mainly in Larnaca and Limassol and in the Troodos Mountains.

With the support of four mobile medical teams, the delegates visited some 30,000 persons in the villages and districts which constitute the Turkish community in the Greek area, providing them with substantial quantities of food and medical supplies.

In the area under Turkish control, even though the ICRC was still waiting for the authorities to guarantee its delegates complete freedom of movement, the delegates visited nearly all the towns and villages of that region, including those on the Karpas Peninsula. They attempted to provide all possible assistance to the families remaining in those localities, especially by the organization of

convoys. With regard to the prisoners and detainees, the ICRC resumed its visits to places of detention in the Greek Cypriot area. Visits were also made to transit camps in the Turkish area. Lastly, the ICRC delegation in Turkey visited three camps for prisoners of war.

Family messages and search

Due to a considerable increase in the activities of the Central Tracing Agency, it was necessary to open additional Agency offices in different parts of Cyprus. Some indication of the task confronting the Agency was given in a report sent back from Cyprus by Miss Françoise Bory, an ICRC press officer. Her article is reproduced below :

We saw him from far away, running and waving his arms to attract our attention. Around him, on the yellow, sun-baked, dusty plain, sheep plucked at the rare clumps of grass. As he came up to our car, the shepherd cried out, "Forma! Forma!" What he wanted was a Red Cross message form, to write to a relative "on the other side of the line".

Everywhere in Cyprus, we found the same impatience, the same anxiety. Since the arrival of the delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross on 22 July, more than 120,000 messages have been sent with the help of the ICRC, between members of separated families, either in Cyprus itself or between those on the island and their relatives abroad.

For the ICRC delegates, the delivery of these family messages is no simple matter. The addressees must be located, and this quest has become a huge undertaking. The mass departure of populations from zones controlled by Turkish forces has emptied villages in the northern part of the island of most of their inhabitants. Only a few old people, who could not or would not leave, still lurk in their homes, often under miserable conditions. The Red Cross delegates find some of them every day, still in a state of shock from the battles in which they were trapped for the past few weeks.

In the southern part of Cyprus, the scattering of tens of thousands of displaced persons has also created countless problems in the gathering of information. To cope with these problems, the ICRC Central Tracing Agency has set up a number of local offices, which depend upon the efficient help of volunteers from the National Red Cross.

One of these offices was opened at Kyrenia, in the occupied zone, and others at Limassol and Larnaca. Mini-offices are also functioning

in many villages where displaced persons are concentrated. The situation changes rapidly, however, for these little centres are closed as soon as a new exodus of refugees gets under way.

The radio provides the means for locating the displaced persons, by daily broadcasts of the names of the addressees on the Red Cross family message forms. When such a person hears his name, he will report as soon as he can to the nearest Red Cross centre and provide his current address. This is then sent to the regional office, which in turn passes it on to headquarters in Nicosia—which will then proceed to deliver the message to the address indicated.

The Red Cross Tracing Agency in Cyprus and its dependent centres carry out in this way a very sizeable job in finding persons whose families have lost all trace of them—persons routinely designated as “missing”. What kind of people are these “missing persons”?

Some of them are soldiers who disappeared in the confusion of hostilities. Others are civilians who can no longer be found in their own home towns nor in collection centres for displaced persons. Still others are prisoners being held in various detention centres. The Agency is concerned with persons in all these categories. To assist in its task, it has several sources of information, the Government and the Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, which hand on to the ICRC lists of persons who have been located.

In addition, Red Cross delegates visiting every place of detention draw up lists of prisoners or receive such lists from the detaining authorities.

All these names are posted in the Red Cross Tracing Agency offices and centres, where families can consult them. No fewer than 35,000 requests involving such “missing persons” have been addressed to the ICRC since the outbreak of hostilities in Cyprus. Positive results have been obtained with 15,000 of these requests.

The work of the Tracing Agency requires enormous patience from the specialists working with it, in gathering all the information required to find a lost friend or relative. This patience is amply rewarded however when it is finally possible to bring a message to the family which may hear no more than the simple words, “I am alive”.

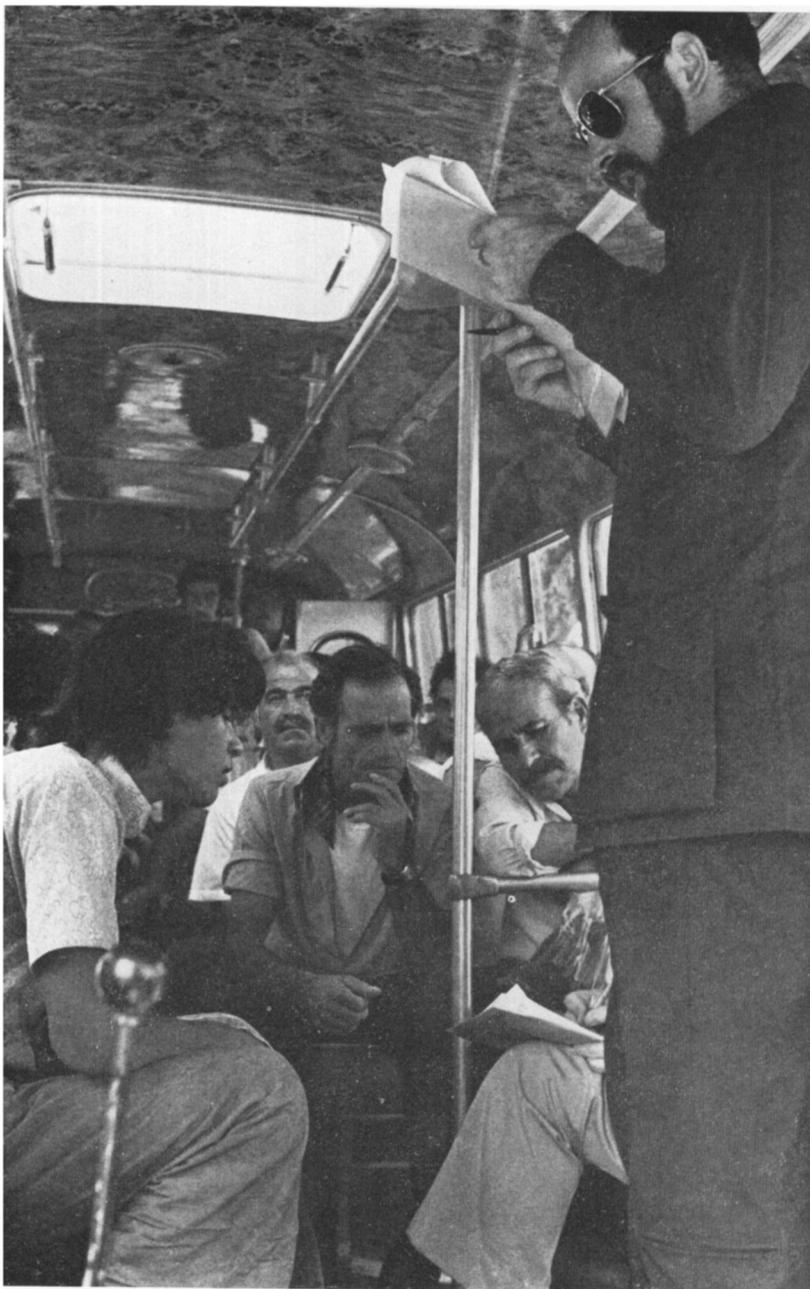
Visits to prisoners

Up to the end of September, the ICRC delegates had carried out some 56 visits to prisoners and detainees in about thirty places of detention and in hospitals, in Turkey as well as in Cyprus itself.

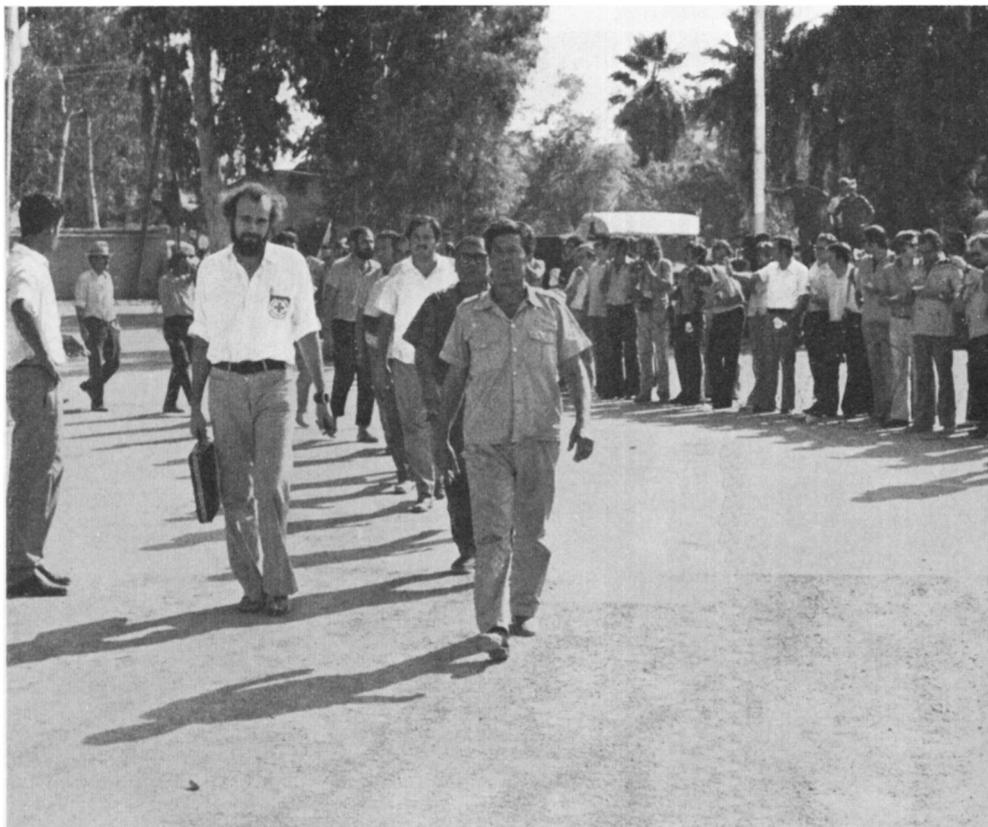
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE IN CYPRUS



ICRC delegates succour old people, abandoned in deserted villages.



ICRC delegates checking the identity of prisoners...



... and accompanying them to the place where they are to be released.



At one of the Central Tracing Agency offices, lists of names of prisoners and detainees visited by ICRC delegates are scanned by anxious relatives.

Four Photos Vaterlaus / ICRC

Release of prisoners

On 16 September, the ICRC published the following press release :

“Pursuant to the agreement concluded on Friday, 13 September between representatives of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, an initial group of 243 wounded and sick prisoners, consisting of 127 Greek Cypriots and 116 Turkish Cypriots, were liberated today, 16 September, under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.”

Subsequently, other such operations took place in Cyprus, under ICRC auspices, enabling hundreds of persons to rejoin their families.

Medical activities

Since 24 August, two mobile medical teams, made available to the ICRC by the Danish and Finnish Red Cross Societies, each consisting of one doctor and two nurses, have been at work in Cyprus. Two other teams, from the same Societies, were subsequently provided. These teams have served to assist the six ICRC medical delegates. Their work has consisted in visiting both Turkish communities in the southern area and Greek Cypriot villages in the northern area, to provide medical care. The mobile teams, working in close co-operation with United Nations doctors, have treated a great number of individuals. They have also carried out evacuations of the wounded and sick and have distributed medicines.

Relief

As of 20 September, the ICRC in Cyprus had distributed 300 tons of food and medicines and 110,000 blankets, in addition to tents and miscellaneous relief supplies.