

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

CONFERENCE OF GOVERNMENT EXPERTS

ON WEAPONS WHICH MAY CAUSE UNNECESSARY SUFFERING OR HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS

In our June issue we published the text of a circular, dated 17 May 1974, relative to the Conference of Government Experts which will meet in Lucerne from 24 September to 18 October 1974. On 13 August, the ICRC sent the following second circular containing further information to all governments which had been invited to take part in the recent Diplomatic Conference on the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts.

In its circular of 17 May 1974, the International Committee of the Red Cross invited all the Governments entitled to participate in the Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Law (Geneva, 20 February-29 March 1974) to nominate experts to take part in a Conference of Government Experts to study in depth the question of prohibition or restriction of the use of conventional weapons which may cause unnecessary suffering or have indiscriminate effects.

The ICRC also asked the Governments that were invited to let it know in writing, before 31 July, whether or not they were in favour of the participation of experts nominated by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam or by other bodies which had not taken part in the Diplomatic Conference.

Many Governments sent replies to the ICRC, either to announce the participation of their experts, or to decline the invitation, or,

again, to state their willingness to send a financial contribution. At the expiry date, 75 Governments had expressed an opinion on the matter of the participation of experts nominated by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam or by other bodies. The ICRC has found that in a majority of replies the opinions expressed are against any change in the list of invitations; 30 Governments wished to include the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam in the countries on the list of invitations, 36 were opposed and 9 expressly stated their abstention. No Government proposed inviting other bodies than the national liberation movements whose participation in the first session of the Diplomatic Conference had been accepted and who were invited accordingly to send experts. The ICRC, consequently, has decided not to amend article 2 of the rules of procedure of the Conference,¹ its composition having now been established definitely and irrevocably. In taking this decision, the ICRC would like to stress once again that the experts at this Conference will be expressing their own views and will not be speaking as plenipotentiaries committing their Governments in their statements.

The ICRC is prepared to take over the duties of the Presidency, in the person of its Vice-President, Mr. Jean Pictet, who has previously presided over the 1971 and 1972 Conferences of Government

¹ *Rule 2*

1. The following shall take part in the Conference :
 - (a) the experts appointed by the Governments of the States invited to the first session of the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts (Geneva, 20 February-29 March 1974) ;
 - (b) experts appointed by the national liberation movements invited to the first session of the said Diplomatic Conference ;
 - (c) representatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and of specialized agencies.
2. A number of technical experts shall take part in the proceedings as advisers.
3. In addition, some representatives of National Red Cross (Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies and of non-governmental organizations shall follow the proceedings as observers.

Experts, which were held before the Diplomatic Conference. The ICRC, taking into consideration the observations that were submitted to it, has introduced some amendments to the rules of procedure, which are communicated to the Governments in its revised form. The only change of any significance is in article 6 : with a view to obtaining a balanced composition among the Presidency and members of the Conference Bureau, the number of vice-presidents has been increased from three to five.

To date, voluntary contributions totalling about 355,000 Swiss francs have been remitted or pledged by twenty States, namely Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (Federal Republic), Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom. Further contributions are expected and the ICRC wishes to express its thanks to all Governments contributing towards the Conference expenses, estimated to reach 500,000 Swiss francs.

The ICRC requests all Governments that have not done so to communicate to it as soon as possible whether they have the intention to participate in the Conference ; to state, in that case, how many experts they expect to send, and to return to the Congress Office at Lucerne the registration forms that had been attached to its circular of 17 May. Additional copies of the documents sent with the invitation are available and will be despatched on request.
