

MAURITANIA

We already mentioned in an earlier issue that the Mauritanian Government had invited Mr. Eric Martin, President of the ICRC, to the ceremonies commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the independence of Mauritania. Mr. Martin was much impressed by the various celebrations, which testified to the nation's enthusiasm, vitality and confidence in the future.

At the same time, it was an opportunity for the President of the ICRC and for the ICRC adviser, Mr. P. Gaillard, who accompanied him, to get an insight into the Mauritanian Red Crescent's activities in the capital and outlying districts. The National Society has now a solid reputation for efficiency in its humanitarian activities. Thanks to the welcome extended to the ICRC President by the Red Crescent leaders, with Mrs. Sall, its President, at their head, followed by his visits to the Society's local branches, Mr. Martin ascertained for himself the effectiveness of the Society's work in combating the disastrous effects of the drought. The work of a few determined persons was enough for the worst to be overcome and for the situation to be altered substantially for the better.

The achievements in the Sahara may thus be presented as an example. We thank the Mauritanian Red Crescent for having kindly sent us an article giving details of the way the tasks were organized and carried out.

It is four years now since the humanitarian and social welfare activities of the Mauritanian Red Crescent, a voluntary relief society and an auxiliary of the public authorities, have been pursued with energy, efficiency and perseverance.

Our country was ravaged by the severe drought which lasted for several years. Lack of water and the consequent waste of pasture land caused whole herds and flocks to perish. The loss of those beasts seriously disturbed the country's economy and social life, and great numbers of people faced ruin and starvation. This dreadful situation called for immediate relief action.

It was in this difficult economic and social climate that the Mauritanian Red Crescent Society was born in conformity with the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and was officially recognized by the Mauri-

tanian Government as the sole National Society carrying out its tasks on Mauritanian territory. Its creation was the result of the need to fulfil several objectives, of which the first and most urgent one was to set up a body sufficiently well organized to provide food supplies and adequate care for the stricken population, large numbers of whom converged on Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, and other towns, in search of water and food.

Despite many difficulties for which solutions had to be found, the Mauritanian Red Crescent managed to train 124 first-aiders, set up 21 local committees and organize five milk distribution centres for children.

Thanks to the boundless activity and determination of the first-aiders and volunteers who threw themselves into their tasks with efficiency and great dedication, to the moral and material assistance of the public authorities, to the generous gifts from sister Societies, the League and the ICRC, and to the welcome relief supplies sent by other international humanitarian organizations, the Mauritanian Red Crescent succeeded in combating malnutrition among children and in instilling new hope into the hearts of large numbers of people crushed by despair.

The following table shows the quantities of food distributed to needy families, to milk distribution centres, to the centre for the protection of mothers and children, and to hospitals.

Description	quantities
Milk	1,094 tons
Flour	2,220 tons
Wheat	480 tons
Millet	188 tons
Maize	136 tons
Rice	18 tons
Sugar	22 tons
Honey	264,000 litres
Oil and cooking butter	146 tons
Clothing	300 bales
Dates	307 tons
Dried meat	2 tons
Canned fish	675,450 tins
Baby food	123,700 bottles
Rice flour	150 tons
High energy food ("aponti")	9,350 cases
Blankets	89,152 blankets
Tents	148 tents

The primary aim of the Mauritanian Red Cross—it could not be otherwise at the time it was created—was to organize aid in the form of emergency relief supplies. But no one could nor ought to stay content with just assistance. The second longer-term objective of our National Society was therefore to seek the rehabilitation of the drought victims by creating and stimulating new development projects: market gardening, the raising of sheep and goats, forestry projects around the capital, and a rural development programme already in progress.

In this way, the persons at present receiving assistance will become, when employed on those various projects, self-supporting workers.

Other programmes, more of a specifically medico-social nature, are included in the project: two programmes of nutrition and health education, day nurseries and kindergartens, school meals, and so forth.

The tasks falling upon the Mauritanian Red Crescent are heavy and will take a long time. In the words of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, speaking at Nouakchott, after having witnessed there the Society's activities, the "Mauritanian Red Crescent, notwithstanding its relatively short experience and the difficulties it has encountered, has already many achievements to its credit. We know that its path is not an easy one, but we have faith in its willingness and competence."

The Society's mission is without doubt arduous, but it is one which the Mauritanian Red Crescent is determined to carry out with all the energy and efficiency it can bring to its task, in order to restore to those people that which they have cruelly lost, and to get them to take a more active part in our country's development.

Persons repatriated from South Vietnam
by the ICRC arriving in **Karachi**...



Photos M. Baumgartner/ICRC



... and **Madras**.



Repatriates from South Vietnam, while aboard the plane, fill in forms for the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC.

Photo M. Baumgartner/ICRC

Democratic Republic of Germany: Presentation of the Florence Nightingale Medal and citation to Sister Ilse Giese.

Photo Erhardt Freund, Wilsdruff

