

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

Africa

Conflict in Southern Africa ICRC Appeal

On 20 March the ICRC President solemnly appealed to all the parties involved in the Southern Africa conflict. The text of the appeal is given in this issue of the *Review*, in the section entitled "International Committee of the Red Cross" (pp. 85-90).

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe

The ICRC delegation in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in January, February and March continued assisting conflict victims, as described in our previous issues: housing construction for displaced persons, medical work in rural districts, and organization of bus transport for more than a thousand people wishing to visit detained relatives in Wha Wha prison.

On 13 February a 25-year-old man was repatriated under ICRC auspices. After studying for three years in the United States he landed in Lusaka by mistake; it took two-and-a-half months of negotiation by the ICRC delegations in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and in Zambia to arrange for him to join his family in Salisbury.

Botswana

Health in the refugee camps has improved. The threat of a typhoid epidemic in the Dukwe camp has been eliminated, following the ICRC inoculation campaign; 8,130 people have recently received a second injection.

In the camps at Selebi Pikwe, Dukwe and Francistown, the ICRC has distributed some 20 tons of milk powder donated by the EEC. Selebi Pikwe and Dukwe received about a hundred tents also. At present there are some 19,000 people living in these camps.

Zambia

Following the attack on two camps near Lusaka towards the end of February, when more than 120 people were injured, the ICRC responded to a request from the ZAPU by supplying 200 tents, 5,000 blankets and 9.2 tons of milk powder donated by the EEC.

In addition the ICRC gave 10 tons of milk powder for the women and children in the Victoria and Moyo camps. It also gave 50 tents, 500 blankets and 5 tons of powdered milk for 500 needy people.

Moreover, the work to make conditions healthier in the refugee camps, as recommended by the ICRC, is going on, and two wells have been sunk.

An ICRC delegate went to a new refugee camp in the Zambezi region to assess the needs which might be met with ICRC assistance.

South Africa

Mr. R. Santschy, the ICRC regional delegate for southern Africa, in Pretoria, was in Namibia/South West Africa from 5 to 9 February. He conferred in Windhoek with the authorities and members of the South African Red Cross regional council.

Two repatriation operations were organized by the Nairobi-based ICRC regional delegation for East Africa: one enabled six people, and the other seven—a mother with her six children—to return to Namibia/South West Africa.

Tanzania and Uganda

Consequent upon the fighting which erupted towards the end of 1978 between Uganda and Tanzania, the ICRC, as mentioned in our previous issue, undertook to assist the civilian victims in Tanzania.

The renewed outbreak of the combat at the beginning of 1979 impelled the ICRC to remind the parties, on 27 January, of their obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

In co-operation with the National Red Cross, forty tons of relief supplies—blankets, milk powder, clothing and kitchen utensils—were

distributed to about 15,000 displaced persons in reception camps in Tanzania.

The situation worsening in Uganda, the regional delegate for East Africa and a medical delegate carried out a survey from 24 February to 8 March, and the ICRC has decided to undertake a relief operation. As was the case in Tanzania, distribution will be handled by the National Society. Milk powder, soap, blankets, clothing and kitchen utensils will be provided for some 4,500 persons who have found refuge in the camps of Kahunge (Toro district) and Ibuga (Ruwendori district). In addition, medical supplies will be provided to the Ibuga dispensary, to bring it back into operation. On 22 March the ICRC regional delegate supervised the first distribution by the Uganda Red Cross.

Ethiopia

The ICRC is continuing its assistance to civilian victims of the fighting in the Ogaden and distributes among them each month about 180 tons of various relief supplies, mainly food and blankets. In the last two months ICRC assistance in the region of Sidamo, Gondar, Harar, Mekele and Bale has consisted of blankets, protein-rich food, salt, sugar, milk, edible oil, cereals and soap.

In January the programme of assistance to amputees began at the Debra Zeyit centre some 30 kms from Addis Ababa. A French physiotherapist has now joined the team. Part of the equipment was imported and part was bought locally.

Chad

February and March were marked by fierce fighting between the Chad armed forces and the armed forces of the north, and between ethnic groups in the south. The ICRC was impelled by the emergency to provide protection and assistance for which it reinforced its delegation by recruiting five extra people, including a doctor and a female nurse from the *Coopération technique suisse* who were already working in Chad.

In February the ICRC broadcast by radio an appeal to all combatants to treat the wounded, prisoners and non-combatants in accordance with fundamental humanitarian principles.

At N'Djamena, split into two enemy sectors, the ICRC opened an office at the beginning of March in the sector held by the armed forces of the north, in order to permit the delegation to work on both sides of the front.

On several occasions the ICRC delegation evacuated casualties in N'Djamena and in Abéché to hospital in the capital. Those from Abéché were flown to N'Djamena in an aircraft chartered by the ICRC.

On each return trip to Abéché the plane took medical supplies for the local hospital. It also conveyed six tons of food for 1,500 wives and children of prisoners of war.

At N'Djamena the ICRC took supplies to people cut off from sources, notably in the central hospital and prison. It also delivered food for some 500 refugees at Koundoul, a locality not far from the capital.

In March, the delegation carried out a survey of needs in the south, in the regions of Moundou and Doba, where several thousand people who had fled the capital and were trying to return to their native villages had sought refuge in improvised camps. The problems of hygiene and food in these camps, caused by the large numbers of people and lack of facilities, made emergency assistance necessary. The ICRC aircraft therefore flew in 1.5 tons of food and medical supplies and a doctor-delegate worked for a time in the Sahr hospital where there were many casualties.

A medical team (a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a radiologist and an operating theatre nurse) flew out from Geneva on 14 March to revive the surgical department of the central hospital in N'Djamena.

In the Tibesti region, in February and March, ICRC delegates visited ten camps where they saw some 430 prisoners of war held by the Frolinat. Seven sick prisoners were removed to the Faya hospital. In addition 13 tons of food were provided to feed about 1,450 people—prisoners of war and their families—at Faya, and food and medical supplies to a value of 28,000 Swiss francs were sent to Mao, north-east of Lake Chad for prisoners of war and their families.

Latin America

Colombia

From 14 January to 1 February, the ICRC regional delegate for the Andean countries, Leonard Isler, was in Colombia where he visited 160 persons detained under the State security law in seven places of detention. In three of the places, under military control, his visit was the

first by an ICRC delegate. In some places he was accompanied by Dr B. Cosendey, a medical delegate.

While in Bogota, Mr Isler had interviews with the Ministers of Defence and of Justice, and with other government officials. His contacts had been arranged by the Colombian Red Cross.

Paraguay

Mr A. Tschiffeli, the ICRC regional delegate for the Southern Cone, and his successor, Mr F. Robadey, were in Paraguay from 6 to 9 February. Mr Tschiffeli introduced Mr Robadey to the authorities and to the National Red Cross Society. The two delegates also visited five political detainees in three place of detention.

Nicaragua

The ICRC action to provide protection and assistance continued in February and March. In the course of those two months ICRC delegates and doctors visited twenty places of detention where they saw 175 persons detained in connection with the events. They continued their regular visits to persons who had sought refugee in several embassies in Managua. During all these visits and also to a number of needy detainees' families relief supplies were distributed.

Large quantities of relief have reached Nicaragua since the beginning of the year, mainly from EEC and Swiss Government donations to the ICRC: 500 tons of flour (Swiss Government), 500 tons of rice and 100 tons of powdered milk (EEC), and 46 tons of tinned meat. Some of these supplies—150 tons of flour, 150 tons of rice and 12 tons of meat—were immediately forwarded to Honduras for the Nicaraguan refugees being cared for by the Honduran Red Cross.

Argentina

The ICRC delegates in Argentina carried on their protection action in February and March. They visited the Sierra Chica and La Plata prisons where 1,357 people were detained.

In January twelve tons of food were distributed to about a thousand needy families of detainees. This aid amounted to 13,800 dollars, in addition to which relief to a value of 2,500 dollars was delivered to the prisons.

Asia

China — Viet Nam conflict

The clashes which took place along the border between China and Viet Nam, from mid-February onwards, led the ICRC to send a note, on 19 February 1979, to each of the parties involved in the conflict, namely the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, reminding them of their treaty obligations.

In its communication, the ICRC also stated its readiness to discharge the tasks incumbent upon it in such situations under the Geneva Conventions, in particular with regard to military and civilian prisoners and missing persons.

Viet Nam

Since June 1978, the ICRC has been organizing the repatriation, from Viet Nam to Taiwan, of Chinese people of Taiwan origin who had been living in Viet Nam and wished to join their relatives in Taiwan. *International Review* has previously reported that eight repatriation flights took place between June and September. Additional flights were arranged on 9 November 1978, and on 1 and 8 March 1979.

Malaysia

After a brief stay in Geneva at the end of February for consultations, Mr. Nicolas Vecsey, Deputy Director of the ICRC Central Tracing Agency, returned to Kuala Lumpur on 5 March. With the Malaysian Red Crescent Society and with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and of the League of Red Cross Societies, he is continuing his study of problems concerning persons reported missing among the Vietnamese refugees in Malaysia and the systematic organization of a scheme to trace them.

In the Vietnamese refugee camps, practical steps have been taken for the exchange of mail between the refugees in the camps and their relatives in various countries: special letter boxes have been placed, standard air-letter forms (similar to the Red Cross family message forms) are now available, and an appropriate system for dealing with incoming and outgoing mail has been introduced.

Thailand

Since the beginning of the year, with the development of events in Cambodia, the ICRC delegation in Thailand has been paying special attention to the situation in the areas along the country's eastern and south-eastern frontier. From 8 January to 1 March, an ICRC delegate made a complete tour of all the police posts, detention centres and refugee camps in this region, with the object of seeing all recent arrivals from Cambodia, arrested by the police for illegal entry into Thailand. He visited altogether 42 places of detention holding 1,539 persons from Cambodia. Emergency supplies, mainly sleeping mats, blankets and soap, were distributed; most of the refugees crossing the border had nothing but the clothes they stood in.

Iran

During the first three months of 1979, the ICRC delegation in Iran was hampered in its tasks because of the confused situation in the country.

After the incidents of 11 February, the ICRC delegation multiplied its efforts to secure from the new authorities in Iran the necessary agreements to continue its protection activities.

However, the ICRC delegation came up against some difficulties which prevented it from discharging its mission in accordance with the standards set by the ICRC.

In February, the delegation made a new assessment of the sanitary, medical and hospitals aspects of the situation and paid special attention to the question of supplies of medicaments.

Middle East

Release of prisoners

On 14 March 1979, an operation for the release of prisoners took place at Geneva, under ICRC auspices. This action was due to the initiative of the Israeli authorities and of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP/GC).

Two aircraft landed almost at the same time at Geneva's Cointrin Airport, one bringing 66 civilian Arab detainees released by the Israeli

authorities and the other an Israeli prisoner of war who had been captured in southern Lebanon on 5 April 1978 and released by the PFLP/GC. Meanwhile, a further ten civilian Arab detainees were released in the Middle East by the Israeli authorities.

During their captivity, all these prisoners had been visited periodically by ICRC delegates. Their release was the result of negotiations by the ICRC lasting several months.

Jordan

The ICRC was invited by the authorities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to visit all places of detention in Jordan, for the discharge of its traditional humanitarian activities. From 10 February to 11 March 1979 a team of four ICRC delegates, including a doctor delegate and an ICRC interpreter visited the following prisons: Mahatta Rehabilitation and Correctional Centre, the General Intelligence Department in Abdali, Zarka Military Prison, the prisons at Madaba, Kerak, Tafleeh, Ma'an, Aqaba, Zarka, Salt, Jarash, Mafraq, Irbid, Kura and Ajlun, and Ruseifah police prison. As is customary, the delegates' report will be sent solely to the Jordanian Government.

Israel and the occupied territories

In February and March, a number of operations involving the conducting of people through check-points took place under ICRC auspices.

Across the Allenby Bridge, a detainee of Iraqi origin who had been released by the Israeli authorities was conducted to Jordan on 13 February; and three persons who had been arrested after entering occupied territory and later released by the Israeli authorities were also taken to Jordan, one on 26 February, one on 8 March and the third on 15 March.

At Quneitra, in the United Nations buffer zone on the Golan Heights, a Syrian shepherd who had strayed into occupied territory was repatriated on 22 February.

At El Khirba, in the United Nations buffer zone in Sinai, in the course of two operations on 28 February and 26 March, 719 persons in all crossed the check-point. From the occupied territories of Gaza and Sinai, 351 persons (including 29 students) went to Cairo; and in the

opposite direction, 70 graduates and 298 other persons joined their families in the occupied territories.

Lebanon

ICRC delegates in Lebanon continued their protection and assistance activities in aid of the civilian victims of the fighting in Lebanon. In February, after the region around Borj el Chemali had been shelled, the ICRC organized the distribution of foodstuffs and blankets to Palestinian refugees in camps.

The ICRC delegates also visited dispensaries in northern Lebanon (Tripoli, Akkar, Batroun, Bcharré) and other places in the south, and handed over medicaments and medical material where required.

The ICRC delegation presented the Lebanese Red Cross with foodstuffs and six and a half tons of powdered milk to be distributed to displaced persons coming from the south.

It also handed over 13 wheel-chairs for disabled persons to the Lebanese National Society and 13 more wheel-chairs to the "Palestinian Red Crescent".

As part of its protection activities, the ICRC delegation visited twice the persons detained at Tell el Nahas by conservative Lebanese groups. Two Syrian prisoners in the hands of the militias of Lebanon's National Liberal Party (NLP) were visited at Beirut at the end of January.

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On 8 February 1979, at Ras Nakura, 14 inhabitants of Lebanon who had been captured by Israeli forces in March 1979 were repatriated under ICRC auspices.

Yemen Arab Republic

After the conflict which broke out towards the end of February between the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the ICRC began a relief programme in aid of the victims.

Mr. F. Isler, ICRC delegate, was sent on 8 March to the Yemen Arab Republic to assess the needs. At Sana'a he met government representatives and Yemen Red Crescent leaders and then went south where he visited Ibb, Taiz, Rada, Suadia, Al-Beyda, Dhamar and other places. In a camp set up at Dhamar he saw about a thousand displaced persons.

While, for the time being, the wounded were being taken care of by Yemen civil and military medical services, the ICRC delegate considered that the civilians who had fled their homes needed help. The ICRC has, therefore, started an emergency aid programme for 5,000 displaced persons. Blankets, mattresses and basic foodstuffs, to a value of 350,000 Swiss francs, are being purchased locally for distribution by the Yemen Red Cross Society.

Mr. Isler spent a week in Geneva from 15 to 22 March, before flying back to Sana'a to supervise the distributions and review the needs in relation to further developments in the area.
