

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

THIRD MEETING OF HEADS OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Third General Meeting of Heads of Information and Public Relations of National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies took place in Varna, Bulgaria, from 12 to 17 June 1973. It was attended by representatives of the ICRC, the League and the Societies of the following countries: Bulgaria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Monaco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, United States of America and Yugoslavia. Editors of Red Cross publications in the socialist countries of Europe also took part in the meeting, the theme of which was *Promotion of the Red Cross image in the world*.¹

The meeting, which was organized jointly by the ICRC and the League following those held in Geneva in 1967 and 1970, was inaugurated in the presence of Mr. Kiril Ignatov, President, and Mr. George Gospodinov, Vice-President of the Bulgarian Red Cross. The discussions were conducted by Mr. Alain Modoux, Head of the ICRC Press and Information Department, and Mr. Marc Gazay, Director of the League's Information Bureau.

There were various subjects on the agenda, including ways and means of developing the infrastructure of Red Cross public relations and information services at national and international level. The meeting laid stress on the need not only to encourage the setting up of information services by those National Societies which had

¹ *Plate.*

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none—and over eighty Societies do already have them—but to provide those in charge of those services with working conditions that would closely associate them, at decision-making level, with the work carried out by the various Red Cross organs. It was realized that what the Red Cross was doing was worth while only if understood and supported by the public, and that was where the role of information was of paramount importance.

The meeting also studied the need to propagate the Red Cross principles and disseminate humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions. Here the ICRC representatives described the practical means already developed among youth, university students, the armed forces and the medical profession. As they pointed out, National Societies nevertheless had to shoulder an increasingly heavy responsibility in informing the public through the mass media.

The meeting considered a number of technical questions having a bearing on information. It was agreed that there should be closer bilateral and multilateral co-operation between National Societies and between those Societies and international Red Cross institutions, to ensure a more rational use of the means available and to make the best possible use of the experience of one and all. Several representatives urged the need to hold regional meetings, which would allow an interchange of ideas and experiences among National Societies confronted with comparable problems arising from the social, economic or cultural context in which they pursued their activities. Such meetings—and some had recently been held in Latin America while others were planned in different parts of the world, particularly in Europe and the Far East—would be extremely useful in finding practical solutions to problems such as fund raising, membership recruitment, the quest for support from the major information media, the use of new audio-visual methods, public opinion polls, etc.

There were very full discussions on the subject of co-operation between the ICRC and League information services and those of National Societies at times of major international relief operations such as had taken place in Nigeria, Jordan, Bangladesh, Nicaragua or Indo-China. While they fully realized the difficulties surrounding those emergency operations, the representatives of National Societies

again asked to be kept informed as rapidly and completely as possible, so as to be able to respond to national information requirements in the same way as the international institutions—whether the ICRC or the League or both together—informed the international press in Geneva.

Some special questions were raised during the discussions. They included the commemoration of World Red Cross Day, relations with regional radio and television bodies, and the promotion of publications by the international Red Cross institutions and their dissemination in the world.

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF RED CROSS AND HEALTH FILMS

The biennial Festival was an occasion to see the best films dealing with the Red Cross and questions of health which National Societies, film companies, universities, research institutes, health organizations and television had produced in recent years.¹ It was held by the Bulgarian Red Cross at Varna from 18 to 27 June, under the patronage of the World Health Organization and the League of Red Cross Societies.² This year there were 250 entries from forty countries.

The official closing ceremony, in Varna's spacious Palace of Sport and Culture, was presided over by Dr. Kiril Ignatov, President of the Bulgarian Red Cross, who had beside him Mr. José Barroso, Chairman of the League's Board of Governors. Also present were the Vice-Ministers of Public Health and National Education of Bulgaria and the Director-General of the Bulgarian Film Industry. The Festival awards were read out.

¹ The Varna Festival was inscribed for the first time this year among the great world Film Festivals, by reason of its recognition by the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations and the International Film and Television Council.

² *Plate.*