

In the Near East during 1971

During 1971 the International Committee of the Red Cross continued, in Israel, the Occupied Territories and the Arab countries, its activities relating to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. This work consisted mainly in visiting military and civilian prisoners, transmitting family messages, organizing the regrouping of broken families and tracing missing persons.

Visiting military and civilian prisoners

ICRC delegates paid regular visits to prisoners of war. In Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt, these visits were made fortnightly while in Syria they were monthly.

All captives received parcels and messages from their families to which they were able to reply.

The 72 Egyptian prisoners of war in Israel received over 1,000 parcels and 3,600 letters from their families and they in turn sent some 6,000 messages.

The 43 Syrian prisoners of war in Israeli hands wrote more than 2,500 letters to their families which had sent them some 500 parcels, and over 2,700 letters.

The eleven Israeli prisoners of war in the Arab Republic of Egypt received over 900 messages and 300 parcels and handed ICRC delegates some 250 letters for their families. The three Israeli prisoners of war held in Syria sent 210 letters and received over 80 parcels and nearly 200 letters.

During the year, several repatriation operations were carried out, enabling fourteen Egyptian prisoners of war including one invalid, ten Lebanese prisoners of war, one wounded Syrian prisoner of war and two wounded Israeli prisoners of war to return home.

The delegates were also concerned with the conditions in which civilians were being held in Israeli-occupied territories. Last year the ICRC made six series of visits to fifteen Israeli places of detention (seven prisons in Israel, six prisons in the occupied terri-

tories and two camps in the Sinai peninsula, the latter being closed down during the year).

Parcels, containing mainly foodstuffs, were distributed monthly to those detainees who had not been visited by their families for three months. More than 7,000 parcels were thus distributed in a dozen prisons. Apart from this, other supplies such as warm underwear, books, fruit, cigarettes, school equipment, glasses and dentures were made available to the prisoners during the year.

As during the previous year, the ICRC delegation organized free bus transport for detainees' relatives unable to pay the fare to visit the prison. In 1971, 791 bus trips were made taking over 51,000 persons to the various Israeli prisons.

Assistance to families

Last year the ICRC continued to assist families in the occupied territories whose houses had been destroyed. This assistance, which was of the utmost urgency, consisted in distributing some 200 tents, 1,700 blankets and other supplies worth a total of 101,940 Sw. francs, in collaboration with the Israeli Social Welfare Organization.

Reuniting of families

The ICRC organized several family reuniting operations between the Arab countries and the occupied territories. In all, 834 persons, 287 in occupied territories and 547 in the Arab countries, were reunited with their families.

A country-by-country breakdown of movements reads as follows: coming from the occupied territories, 529 persons returned to the Arab Republic of Egypt while 173 persons crossed the Suez Canal in the opposite direction. From Syria, 50 persons went to the occupied Golan Heights. From Jordan, 64 persons were reunited with their families in the occupied territories and eleven others left the occupied territories for Amman. Seven persons from the occupied territories went to the Lebanon.

It should be mentioned that where Jordan is concerned family reunions are organized without the help of the ICRC which only lends a hand in particular or urgent cases.

Students' travel

During 1971, 1,676 Palestinian students from Gaza crossed the Suez Canal. During successive operations under ICRC auspices last August, 676 students studying in Cairo went to Gaza for their holidays and returned to the Arab Republic of Egypt in October; in September, over 1,000 students from Gaza went to the Arab Republic of Egypt to take up university studies.

At the same time a score of Palestinian doctors moved to the occupied Gaza-Sinai territories in order to practise there.

Transmission of family messages

During the year the ICRC handled 93,243 messages between the occupied territories and the Arab countries. Of the 45,263 messages sent to the occupied territories, 17,132 came from the Arab Republic of Egypt, 14,593 from Syria, 11,632 from Jordan, 404 from Lebanon, and 1,502 from the other Arab countries. Of the 47,980 letters in the opposite direction, 17,595 went to the Arab Republic of Egypt, 17,471 to Syria, 9,282 to Jordan, 1,340 to Lebanon and 2,292 to other Arab countries.

Tracing missing persons

The number of tracing requests submitted to the ICRC delegations concerning civilian and military persons reported missing during and after the war of June 1967 decreased sharply.

In 1971 the ICRC delegation in Israel and the occupied territories were presented with 27 requests concerning military personnel to which they were able to give 26 answers, and 172 requests concerning civilians to which they were able to give 112 answers.

The ICRC delegation in Cairo received 4,768 requests concerning civilians and 813 concerning military personnel and was able to give 3,883 and 797 answers respectively

In Syria, the ICRC delegation received 667 requests concerning civilians and 558 concerning military personnel. It was able to give 478 and 531 answers respectively.