

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

NEW STRUCTURE FOR ICRC MEDICAL DIVISION

The ICRC has reorganized its Medical Division.

Under the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. R. Käser, medical function is increasingly prominent in the work of the International Committee. The Chief Medical Officer has, first of all, to examine all problems of a medical and paramedical nature and to deal with them in the light of ICRC's thought and of its humanitarian mandate, to follow and to promote the development of humanitarian law and its dissemination in the field of health services, then to take all practical measures required by the medical aspects of the ICRC's traditional duties of protection and assistance.

In order to accomplish this, the Chief Medical Officer, who is directly responsible to the Executive Council, must not only work closely with the various services of the ICRC but has to maintain contact with other international humanitarian bodies, with the medical directors of National Red Cross Societies and the medical services of armed forces, with medical associations, universities, and so on. Only by so doing will he be able to arrange for the recruitment and instruction of medical staff and to draw up long-term plans and streamline the medical activities of the ICRC.

The implementation of the Chief Medical Officer's decisions and the co-ordination of the medical programmes of the ICRC delegations in the field rest with the Medical Division, headed by Dr. R. Russbach. The Division is linked with the Operations Department of the ICRC, while technically under the supervision of the Chief Medical Officer. Its task will be to recruit, choose and instruct doctors for missions in the field, current or future, either in protective duties (visiting prisoners of war or political detainees, for example) or in assistance operations (treating casualties in a hospital during hostilities, running a clinic in refugee camps, etc.). All these activities require auxiliary staff also, who have to be trained.

The Medical Division also has the responsibility for planning every operation before it starts: it must find out what the needs are, how many people require help, and how and where the ICRC can best provide it, bearing in mind available local resources and the actual situation.

The pharmaceutical section, attached to the Medical Division, has to gather together the supplies needed for the actions undertaken, and to deal with the purchase and storage of drugs and medical supplies; transport of this material to the delegations and recuperation of any surplus are effected in co-operation with the Relief Division.

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

Africa

Madagascar

On 20 December 1976, there were a number of serious clashes in Majunga, in the north-west of Madagascar, between Malagasy citizens and immigrants from the Comores who had been resident in Madagascar for many years. As a result of these incidents, the Government of the Comores decided, with the agreement of the Malagasy authorities, to repatriate the Comorian community in Majunga, numbering some 16,000 persons, who, in the interim, had been concentrated in camps provided by the army. The Government of the Comores called for international assistance, including that of the ICRC, to enable it to carry out this task.

The ICRC sent a delegate to Madagascar and to the Comores to size up the situation. In Madagascar he found on 12 January about 15,000 persons in six camps in Majunga. The Malagasy Red Cross, with the help of the armed forces and the police, was looking after the refugees and providing them with food and medical supplies. The Malagasy Government had made available a ship to carry the Comorians back to their homeland and some seven or eight thousand persons had already set off. The ICRC delegates brought with him ICRC relief supplies—consisting mainly of foodstuffs—to a value of 10,000 Swiss francs. In addition, the ICRC in Geneva was trying to find further funds to enable it to continue helping the refugees until their departure and to procure medical supplies and clothing for them.