

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.

In the Comores, the ICRC decided to help the Government which was facing considerable difficulties in coping with the influx of refugees. A campaign to help the Comorians in their country of origin does not really come within the purview of the ICRC's activities but is more the concern of United Nations specialized agencies. For this reason, the ICRC will limit itself to providing temporary emergency aid until other bodies take over. On 26 January, an ICRC mission, composed of a medical delegate and a nurse, arrived at Moroni in the Comores. It soon saw that the refugees from Madagascar were in need of help. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provided the ICRC with funds to finance this emergency operation.

Meanwhile, in Madagascar, the Malagasy and Comorian authorities had completed the repatriation of the refugees from the camps to the Comores. By the end of January, the ICRC delegate considered that ICRC help in Madagascar was no longer necessary, but that the medical delegate and the nurse sent to the Comores should continue to assist the new arrivals who, on disembarking, were immediately lodged with families. The work of the ICRC representatives mainly involved the organization, in co-operation with the authorities, of the distribution of relief supplies rather than medical aid.

A representative of the League of Red Cross Societies arrived in the Comores on 9 February. In consultation with the ICRC delegates he will consider how the League can best continue the work started by the ICRC.

Rhodesia/Botswana

On 30 January, some 400 black children of the Munama mission school in Rhodesia crossed the nearby border into Botswana. The Rhodesian authorities asked the ICRC to intervene to have the children returned to their families, while the Botswana authorities announced that they would have no objection to a visit from ICRC delegates aimed at finding a solution to the matter.

An ICRC delegate went to Botswana on 5 and 6 February and met some of the children in Francistown. On 6 February a group of parents saw their children and those children who so desired—53 in all—returned home with their parents.

South Africa

In January, the ICRC regional delegate for Southern Africa once again visited the three Cuban prisoners of war held in Pretoria.

Djibouti

The ICRC Regional Delegate for East Africa went to Djibouti on 10 February. With the agreement of the French authorities he visited the inmates of the Djibouti Central Prison, 16 of whom claimed political detainee status.

During the next few days, he also spoke with the representatives of different groups who will be called upon to assume various tasks when the French Territory of the Afars and Issas becomes independent on 1 July of this year.

Mauritania

Between 19 and 25 January, two ICRC delegates in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, accompanied by representatives of the Mauritanian Red Crescent Society, visited 126 prisoners belonging to Polisario (the Popular Liberation Front of Saquet El Hamra and Rio de Oro).

The delegates also had talks with the Mauritanian authorities, in the course of which they discussed the humanitarian problems raised by the situation in the former Spanish Sahara. They informed the authorities of the action undertaken by the ICRC in favour of Mauritanian prisoners held by the Polisario forces. Family messages were exchanged through the good offices of the Mauritanian Red Crescent.

Middle East

Lebanon

Mr. M. Naville, former President of the ICRC, went on a mission to Lebanon from 22 to 28 January, accompanied by Mr. M. Convers, delegate general for the Middle East, to assess the situation and study the current problems and future activities of the ICRC. Mr. Naville had meetings with the President of the Lebanese Republic, H. E. Mr. Elias Sarkis; the Prime Minister; the Minister for Social Affairs; the President of the Lebanese National Red Cross Society, Mrs. Issa el Khoury; and Dr. Arafat of the "Palestinian Red Crescent". He also visited the ICRC delegation and establishments.

Prisoners. — The situation in southern Lebanon remains tense and confrontations between the opposing factions took place on several occasions during January and February. Those taken prisoners were

generally detained for only a short time and ICRC delegates visited them during their detention.

Relief supplies. — During January and up to 15 February, the ship Kalliopi, chartered by the ICRC, made several journeys from Cyprus to Lebanon, transporting more than 1,200 tons of aid. The cargoes comprised mostly medical supplies, provisions, blankets and clothing. As is customary, this aid will be distributed as and where the need is found to be greatest.

Tracing Agency. — The Agency continues searching for the missing and transmitting family messages, co-operating as far as possible with the Lebanese Red Cross and the “Palestinian Red Crescent”.

Medical Assistance. — The ICRC is co-operating in the setting up of several modern rehabilitation centres for the disabled and has received various proposals from National Red Cross Societies who are offering to take on one or other of these projects. The difficulty is to find qualified personnel who can free themselves to go and work in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the ICRC was able to send a specialist in ocular prostheses to Beirut at the end of February.

The programme for distributing medical supplies to clinics continues, particularly in the rural areas. Furthermore, the ICRC delegation is taking a census of the wounded needing prostheses and rehabilitation.

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On 3 February 1977, the League of Red Cross Societies launched an appeal to all National Societies to provide the Lebanese Red Cross with material and financial help to enable it to recover from its heavy losses and to resume its humanitarian activities as before.

Israel and the Occupied Territories

The ICRC delegate general for the Middle East, Mr. M. Convers, went to Israel from 10 to 18 February to study all the current activities and problems together with our delegation and the Israeli authorities.

In January, demonstrations took place on the West Bank of the Jordan and these were followed by arrests. This further aggravated the problem of over-population in the prisons, a problem to which the ICRC delegates have drawn the attention of the authorities time and time again, and which was partly responsible for the hunger strike by the inmates of Ashkelon prison in December 1976 and at the beginning of 1977.

The ICRC delegates visited this prison at the end of December and noted the strikers' demands, which they passed on to the Israeli authorities. These demands called for better treatment during detention, particularly as far as medical, cultural and family matters were concerned, and about which the ICRC had previously presented recommendations to the authorities concerned. ICRC delegates again visited the Ashkelon prison from 8 to 10 February and interviewed 97 detainees without witnesses.

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Some cases of cholera were reported last December in the occupied territory of Gaza. The operations which had allowed visitors and students to travel from the Nile Valley to the occupied territories of Gaza and Sinai (or vice-versa) under the auspices of the ICRC were suspended from December at the request of the Egyptian authorities.

Syria

Over the last few months, the ICRC delegation in the Syrian Arab Republic has been engaged in helping Lebanese refugees in Syria. From the credit account opened by the ICRC in favour of the delegation in order to aid these refugees, the delegation has spent approximately 50,000 Swiss francs, mainly to buy blankets and mattresses. In co-operation with local branches of the Syrian Red Crescent, distributions were made to the refugees in Damascus and the surrounding areas in November and to those in the Homs-Tartous region in December. In the Homs-Tartous region, Palestinian refugees arriving from Lebanon also received aid from the ICRC. These Lebanese refugees do not generally remain long in Syrian territory but return to Lebanon as soon as the situation permits; consequently, their numbers often vary.

Latin America

In carrying out a reorganization of its delegations in Latin America, the ICRC has established, in addition to its Caracas regional delegation whose sphere of activity extends to the countries of the Andean region, two other regional delegations: one in Guatemala for Central America and the other in Buenos Aires for the southern part of South America.

The delegation in Chile continues to deal exclusively with ICRC work in that country and has now been attached to the regional delegation in Buenos Aires.

The work of ICRC delegates throughout Latin America is mainly concerned with persons detained for reasons or offences of a political nature, and with members of their families. The delegates also maintain contacts with National Red Cross Societies and governments of Latin American countries.

Guatemala

On 18 January 1977, an agreement was signed by the Guatemalan Government and the ICRC on the setting-up, in Guatemala City, of an ICRC regional delegation whose sphere of activity will cover all the Central American States from Mexico to Panama and those in the Caribbean.

On 2 February, Mr. V. Umbricht, Vice-President of the ICRC Executive Board, and Mr. R. Chevalley, the ICRC's new regional delegate, went to Guatemala to attend the official opening of the regional delegation, which operates from premises kindly made available to the ICRC free of charge by the Guatemalan Red Cross.

At the opening ceremony, attended by representatives of the authorities and of the Red Cross, Mr. V. Umbricht underlined the understanding shown by the Guatemalan Government towards the ICRC and the valuable co-operation which the latter received at the hands of the authorities and the National Red Cross Societies. In this address, Mr. Umbricht said:

“... the request submitted by the International Committee to the Guatemalan Government (to open a regional delegation on Guatemalan territory) was dealt with in a manner which showed that the Government not only understood, but that it genuinely shared the ICRC's concern. In the past, the ICRC has opened regional delegations in several countries but nowhere was an agreement concluded so swiftly as in Guatemala. I would like to express my deepest thanks to the Government of Guatemala for all the facilities offered to us.

I also wish to stress the very important part which the President of the Guatemalan Red Cross played in the fulfilment of our plans. Dr. Augusto Bauer Arzu and his colleagues are inspired by the “faith that moves mountains”, and it is certainly thanks to the excellent relations between the authorities and the Guatemalan Red Cross that we were able to set

up our regional delegation in Guatemala in such a short time. The ICRC knows now that it can count not only on the National Society's co-operation but also on relations of deep friendship which lead to efficient co-operation.

The cordiality with which our regional delegate has been received in this land and the generosity of the Guatemalan Red Cross in handing over to us free of charge two splendid fully equipped offices constitute ample proof of the high esteem with which the ICRC is regarded here. . . .”

Argentina

When the ICRC President was in Buenos Aires in December 1976, he received from the government authorities all the assurances he had asked for concerning humanitarian action in Argentina. As a result, the ICRC delegation in Buenos Aires has already begun making visits to places of detention.

Since 17 January, ICRC delegates have visited various penitentiary establishments in the capital and in other towns, paying particular attention to the detainees' state of health, their living and sanitary conditions, and their treatment.

Concomitantly with the programme of visits to places of detention, the ICRC delegation is considering ways and means of setting up a plan of assistance.

Chile

In December 1976, ICRC delegates visited seven places of detention in the provinces, holding altogether 71 detainees, and in January 1977, they visited 23 places of detention containing 226 detainees.

Relief supplies to a value of about 6,900 dollars were distributed in the places of detention in December; in addition, medicaments were sent to five places of detention. Also in December, 485 detainees' families in Santiago and 940 detainees' families in the provinces received assistance to a value of about 84,300 dollars.

A number of detainees having been released from time to time during the past year, the ICRC's organization was trimmed in proportion to the new situation and its delegation staff in Santiago reduced.

Its delegates will continue to visit persons still in detention, convicted or still on trial. It will also continue providing aid to needy families of



Guatemala: Mr. V. Umbricht, ICRC Vice President, speaking at the ceremony for the opening of the ICRC regional delegation for Central America and the Caribbean. (From right to left) General L. Vassaux, representative of the President of the Republic; Dr. A. Bauer Arzu, President of the Guatemala Red Cross Society; Mr. R. Chevalley, ICRC regional delegate; Mr. Gut, Swiss Ambassador; Mr. Enrique Cañas, representative of the League of Red Cross Societies.

Photo Galiano-Guatemala



Viet Nam: Mr. J. P. Hocké, ICRC Director of Operations, and Mr. K. Seevaratnam, League representative, with members of the Viet Nam Red Cross, in Hanoi.



Hanoi: A meeting of the Committee of the National Red Cross Society of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, with ICRC and League representatives.

detainees and will carry on with its other activities, such as enquiries concerning missing persons, the forwarding of family messages, the issue of travel documents, and so on.

Nicaragua

The Vice-President of the ICRC Executive Board, Mr. V. Umbricht, accompanied by Mr. R. Chevalley, ICRC regional delegate for Central America, went to Nicaragua on a mission which started on 27 January. In a long interview with Nicaragua's President, Mr. Umbricht obtained authorization for the ICRC to visit places of detention. At the end of this meeting, two centres of detention were visited by the ICRC representatives in conformity with the ICRC's standard directives. In particular, they spoke with detainees, without witnesses. As customary, reports on the visits will be sent solely to the authorities concerned.

Paraguay

In November 1976, the ICRC regional delegate for the southern section of South America ("Cono Sur"), went on a short mission to Paraguay, accompanied by a medical delegate.

He met National Red Cross Society officials and, with the medical delegate, visited two places of detention where he spoke with more than 350 detainees, without witnesses.

Asia

Viet Nam

The National Red Cross Society of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam was host to a delegation from the International Red Cross which visited Hanoi from 11 to 20 January.

During the visit, Mr. J.-P. Hocké, Director of the Operations Division of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. K. J. Seevaratnam, regional representative of the League of Red Cross Societies for Asia and the Pacific area, had talks with the leading personalities of the National Society: Dr. Nguyễn Van Thu, President, Dr. Nguyễn Van Tin, Vice-President, Mr. Truong Xuân Nam, General Secretary, and Mr. Nguyễn Duc Bâ, Head of External Relations.

The discussions examined in detail the work accomplished during 1976 under the International Red Cross programme of aid to Viet Nam.

After this, the Vietnamese Red Cross emphasized that it needed continuing help from the International Red Cross, and put forward various public health projects: provision of equipment for a medical centre and four auxiliary centres to care for the population of Ho Chi Minh Ville; the construction of hospitals with 60 to 100 beds, completion of a 250-bed hospital, equipment of a blood bank. Assistance on a large scale was also requested for the manufacture of medicaments in Viet Nam itself.

In addition, the Red Cross Society of Viet Nam urgently required large quantities of cereals, to be distributed to the needy population in the southern part of the country. Finally, the Society asked for support in promoting the Junior Red Cross and in building new headquarters for the Society in Hanoi.

The International Red Cross is prepared to start these projects off by a first contribution of one million dollars. The remaining sum required will be sought among other National Societies.

During their stay in the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, the members of the delegation were received by the Vice-President of the Republic, by the Minister of Health, and by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Thailand

At the end of January, ICRC Director of Operations, Mr. J.-P. Hocké, visited Thailand. He introduced to the authorities there the new head of the ICRC delegation, Mr. F. Amar, and discussed the various problems related to the work of the International Committee in that country.

In past years, in 1975 in particular, the ICRC carried out many and varied activities in favour of Indochina refugees in Thailand. Since then, the regional office for south-east Asia of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and other bodies, have begun work there, and the ICRC has concentrated on helping refugees in detention, whom it has visited repeatedly, and on trying to trace missing persons. The ICRC will undertake activities only in fields where no other humanitarian body is engaged, and the delegation carries out surveys and census-taking in all areas where there are refugees, in order to assess the situation, draw up plans for the future and set lines of demarcation for ICRC activities.

After discussion of this very general problem, the talks went on to deal with specific questions, particularly the repatriation from Viet Nam of certain foreign nationals, with a stopover in Thailand.

The Bangkok delegation no longer forms part of the group known as the Indochina Bureau, set up in April 1975. Henceforth it will be engaged in specifically ICRC activities.

Laos

The head of the ICRC delegation in the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the League of Red Cross Societies' regional representative for Asia and the Pacific were the guests of the Ministry of Public Health of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in Vientiane, from 21 to 24 January.

In discussions which took place during the visit, the International Red Cross undertook to provide medicines and supplies for a period of three months to three hospitals in Vientiane. A further period of aid of a year or more would be requested from National Red Cross Societies.

It was agreed that the International Red Cross would contribute to developing the Lao Red Cross, which would have to be reorganized in order to accomplish, at national and regional levels, its role as auxiliary to the public authorities, under the Ministry of Public Health.

Various projects in the field of social medicine—a blood transfusion service, first aid, pre-disaster planning, help for victims of social evils, for lepers, for the homeless—will be studied together with WHO and other UN agencies, which the International Red Cross delegation has already consulted.

Sri Lanka

The ICRC regional delegate for the Asian sub-continent carried out a mission to Sri Lanka from 26 January to 10 February. He visited five places of detention containing a total of about 300 political detainees. He also saw a sick detainee in the general hospital in Colombo. He was permitted to talk to the detainees without witnesses.

With the collaboration of the National Red Cross Society, he gave the detainees books, writing materials and sports articles, bought locally.

After the visits, the regional delegates had talks with the representatives of the authorities in charge of the detainees and discussed his initial findings; as is customary, detailed reports in writing will be sent to the Sri Lanka Government.