

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

(January-February 1986)

Africa

Ethiopia

In January and February, the ICRC reduced, as planned, the level of its relief activities in Ethiopia. This reduction was made possible, on the one hand, by an increase in food supplies for the population in the northern provinces of that country affected by conflict and drought and, on the other, by more intensive activity on the part of other voluntary agencies in the area. While leaving in place the structures which would enable it rapidly to set up a large-scale assistance programme if the need were to appear in a given region, the ICRC has lowered the volume of its general relief distributions. In December 1985, 10,700 tonnes were distributed to 830,000 persons. This was reduced to 5,000 tonnes for 424,300 persons in January, and further to 2,800 tonnes for 181,000 persons in February in the provinces of Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo, Gondar and Hararge. The last three therapeutic feeding centres were closed on 16 January (Wukro), and on 16 and 27 February (Idaga Hamus and Adwa). However, ICRC medical teams continued to monitor the health of the populations living in provinces which were receiving assistance, concentrating their activities on groups of displaced persons in Eritrea (in the region between Keren and Barentu), Tigray (in the region between Aksum and Adwa and the region of Mehony), Wollo (in the region of Sekota) and Hararge (Wobera Woreda; Habro Woreda), all areas with major security problems.

Tracing activities by the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, resulting from the government's resettlement programme, remained blocked because the authorities had not allowed ICRC delegates to go to the areas in the west and southwest of the

country where displaced persons were being sent. However, the ICRC, in conjunction with other organizations, was able to start a programme to reunite families. The programme seeks to find the relatives of unaccompanied children by publicly displaying the children when food is distributed in Tigray and Wollo. So far about one hundred children have thus been reunited with their families.

In connection with the protection of prisoners captured in the Ogaden conflict, new steps have been taken by the ICRC aimed at repatriating the persons involved. On 27 February, two letters signed by President Hay were sent to President Barre of Somalia and President Mengistu of Ethiopia asking the two heads of State to consent to the repatriation of all the prisoners of war.

Finally, in the area of dissemination, the ICRC organized 135 lecture and debate sessions during January and February on the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law and the principles of the Red Cross. Some 80,000 persons from various segments of society took part.

Uganda

In January, the ICRC continued to carry out its activities in Uganda, operating out of both Kampala and Kasese in the southwest region of the country under the control of the National Resistance Army.

Starting on 16 January, when the government changed hands, the delegates, accompanied by a doctor and three nurses, carried out a general assessment of the situation in Kampala, in the southwest of the country, in Hoima, Masindi, Jinja, Mbale and Soroti. In the north of the country, held by troops of the former government, the ICRC was present in Arua and Gulu. Medical supplies were distributed to hospitals and dispensaries.

In February, a systematic assessment was carried out in the region north of Kampala known as the "triangle". It revealed 100,000 thousand needy civilians returning to their villages of origin. A programme to assist them in their resettlement was developed in conjunction with the National Society.

In the realm of protection of detainees, delegates began a series of visits in February to all government places of detention. They were given access, in accordance with the ICRC's normal criteria, to about 6,000 security detainees in 12 places of detention.

Chad

Following the resumption of fighting in northern Chad, the ICRC delegation in N'Djamena approached the Chad government, requesting access to all of the recently captured prisoners of war. At the same time, contact was made with representatives of GUNT ("Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition") and of Libya in order to gain access to all the prisoners of war captured by them since the beginning of the conflict.

On 12 February, 14 prisoners of war of Sudanese nationality and incarcerated in N'Djamena were released and repatriated to Sudan with technical co-operation from the ICRC.

Republic of South Africa

During a brief visit to Switzerland, Mr. Roelof "Pik" Botha, the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, was received at ICRC headquarters on 14 February by President Hay who presented a survey of the institution's activities and problems in southern Africa. Discussions centered on the difficult subject of ICRC visits to persons arrested in South Africa under the state of emergency and the case of Du Toit, the South African prisoner, who is being held in Luanda and who was visited by the ICRC for the first time on 5 February.

From 6 to 31 January, an initial training course was organized jointly by the ICRC and the South African Red Cross Society for about 30 Red Cross community organizers. The organizers will be based in the different townships and will have the task of developing the activities of the South African Red Cross Society and disseminating knowledge of the principles of the Red Cross throughout the country.

Latin America

Haiti

Two delegates based in Costa Rica went to Haiti on 28 January in order to obtain the authorities' permission to visit persons arrested during the disturbances in the country at the beginning of

1986. They travelled to various places in the north and the south of the country and to the national penitentiary in Port-au-Prince to gather information on the subject. Following the change of government, the persons detained during the disturbances were released. This was confirmed to the ICRC by the new Minister of Justice.

In addition, ICRC delegates maintained regular contact with the Haitian National Red Cross Society, in Port-au-Prince and in the country as a whole, especially concerning the setting up of a first-aid programme. On 31 January they asked the Society to remind the public of the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, which form the basis of Red Cross action, and of the respect which must be shown to persons, vehicles and structures bearing the red cross emblem.

Finally, the mission to Haiti provided an opportunity to establish relations with the new authorities and to make them acquainted with the ICRC. A meeting took place on 12 February with Mr Gérard Gourgues, Minister of Justice, and on 14 February with Mr. Jacques François, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

El Salvador

In the course of the usual visits to the places of detention run by the Ministry of Justice and Defence (military garrisons and Security Corps) 165 new detainees were registered in January and 166 in February. During the same period, tracing requests from families were registered for 249 persons reported missing and/or presumed detained. On 25 February, 5 regular armed forces soldiers held by the Salvadorean opposition were handed over by the latter to the ICRC, which returned them to the military authorities.

Following operations carried out by the army in the region of Guazapa, action was taken to aid civilians who had been displaced by the army or had fled the combat zones. This action consisted of registering those persons, both with a view to their protection and to make it easier for them to find lodging (with members of their families or in accommodation specially organized by the Church). In addition, tracing requests for missing persons were processed, and family news and several groups of civilians were transferred between different places of refuge.

In January and February, 500 and 600 tonnes of foodstuffs were distributed respectively to 102,000 and 118,000 civilian victims

of the conflict. Medical consultations were given to more than 3,000 persons a month and more than 1,000 persons were given dental treatment. The ICRC continued to monitor the food situation for children and improve hygienic conditions for the civilian population (installing latrines and improving the supply of drinking water). During the period under review, however, the "sorties" by ICRC medical and relief teams into the different areas requiring assistance were restricted by military operations.

Lectures organized to acquaint the armed forces with international humanitarian law and Red Cross activities were attended by 850 persons in January and 3,590 in February.

Nicaragua

In January and February, ICRC delegates carried out visits to four regional prisons (in Chinandega, Esteli, Granada and Matagalpa) and to the "Zona Franca" prison in Managua. These places of detention were holding a total of 995 detainees eligible for ICRC protection.

In assistance activities on behalf of detainees, members of their families and civilians affected by the conflict situation, 149 tonnes of foodstuffs were distributed to 29,000 people in January, and 138 tonnes to 28,000 people in February. At the end of January, an assesment was made of the situation of displaced persons in the Río Coco region of northern Nicaragua. This region will henceforth be included in the assistance programme jointly run by the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross.

Asia

Conflict in Afghanistan

ICRC delegates continued to visit the two Soviet nationals still interned in Switzerland. One of them, who had reached the end of his period of internment, returned to the USSR on 26 February after confirming his wish to be repatriated.

Activities in Pakistan

The number of wounded admitted to the surgical hospital in Peshawar remained high (329 admissions) in January and February considering the time of year. Consequently, the number of surgical

operations performed was also very high (317 in January and 345 in February). The situation in Quetta (Baluchistan), on the other hand, remained static; 70 wounded persons were admitted in January and 42 in February. The number of operations performed rose to 123 in January before falling back to 78 in February.

The activity of the ambulance teams operated by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society with support from the ICRC and based in Parachinar, Miram Shah, Wana, Khar Bajaur and Chaman increased markedly in February. During that month, they carried out 81 evacuations (as against 64 in January) and gave first-aid to 104 wounded persons (as against 42 in January).

The rehabilitation centre for paraplegics admitted 24 new patients in January and 9 in February. At the end of February, 32 Pakistanis and 41 Afghans were being treated there. The orthopaedic workshop provided 67 war amputees with prostheses or appliances during the 2 months under review.

In addition, the ICRC continued its training programme in the area of first-aid and the dissemination of basic humanitarian rules and the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross. The 37th and 38th first-aid courses were organized in Peshawar in January and February, while in Quetta the 10th and 11th such courses took place. Two-day courses were also held to introduce participants to basic humanitarian rules and teach them to dress wounds; there were 38 sessions in Peshawar, 15 in Quetta and 4 at the first-aid station in Chaman.

Conflict in Kampuchea

Activities in Kampuchea

In January, an 11-year-old girl, separated from her parents when she was a baby, was reunited with her family in France. This was the first time that the ICRC delegation in Phnom Penh has succeeded in arranging the reunification of a family.

In the medical sphere, the ICRC provided assistance to three hospitals in the capital. In addition, an assessment was made of the situation at the hospital in Kompong Speu.

The relief programme for orphanages was continued. In February, a delegate visited the orphanage in Kompong Speu in order to assess its needs and to supervise the distribution of relief supplies consisting of hygiene and leisure articles and construction materials.

Activities on the Khmer-Thai border

The case of some 4,000 Vietnamese refugees, who had come across Kampuchea to Thailand and been temporarily housed in a separate area of the Khmer camp known as "site 2", was examined by a Thai commission (as was reported in the previous issue of the Review). In January and February, representatives of the United States, Australia, France and Canada—countries which might give these refugees permanent asylum—carried out their own examination of individual cases.

At the end of February, 488 persons had been granted asylum in other countries whereas there was a total of 4,527 of these refugees on the border.

Burma

The regional delegate, based in New Delhi, spent a week in Rangoon where an agreement was signed on the details of the programme for amputees being carried out jointly by the Burma Red Cross Society, the Ministry of Health and the ICRC at the hospital for the handicapped in Rangoon. Three ICRC specialists are training Burmese staff in physiotherapy and the making of prostheses.

Indonesia

In February 1985, the ICRC was officially approached by the Indonesian and Portuguese authorities to organize the repatriation of former Portuguese functionaries in East Timor. The details were discussed during 1985 and the first two repatriation operations took place in January and February 1986; 57 persons have left East Timor for Lisbon.

Middle East

Lebanon

Following the heavy fighting which broke out in East Beirut on 13 January, the ICRC reinforced its personnel on the spot by sending two delegates and two additional nurses, and opened

emergency offices in Archrafieh and Antelias. It was thus possible to meet the most urgent medical needs. While the wounded were evacuated by Lebanese Red Cross workers, ICRC nurses regularly visited the hospitals, dispensaries and Lebanese Red Cross first-aid stations to distribute medical supplies. To meet major blood needs, 244 units provided by the Swiss Red Cross were forwarded to hospitals in Beirut by the Lebanese Red Cross. These hospitals also received from the ICRC the equipment necessary for bleeding donors, blood typing and performing transfusions.

During the same period, the ICRC provided relief supplies (blankets, foodstuffs and cooking utensils) to civilians who had been displaced or isolated by the events in East and West Beirut, the Upper Metn, Souk el Gharb and in the north of the country. A large part of these relief supplies was distributed by local sections of the Lebanese Red Cross while the ICRC came to the aid of civilians trapped by the fighting. In order to reach them it was necessary first to negotiate ceasefires with the parties to the conflict.

From 17 to 22 February, Israeli forces carried out a search operation in Southern Lebanon after two of their soldiers had been taken prisoner. After obtaining the consent of the different parties to the conflict, ICRC delegates went to villages where the population required relief supplies or medical treatment. In conjunction with the Lebanese Red Cross, the ICRC evacuated eleven wounded, 43 sick persons, 12 children and elderly civilians, and the mortal remains of 5 persons.

During January and February, the ICRC distributed standard medical kits worth some 80,000 Swiss francs and other medical supplies worth some 90,000 Swiss francs to Lebanese hospitals and dispensaries. In addition, standard medical kits and other medical supplies worth some 25,000 Swiss francs were handed over to the Lebanese Red Cross. During the same period, relief supplies were distributed to some 12,000 persons.

The Tracing Agency offices exchanged 2,862 family messages and registered six tracing requests in January and February.

The ICRC continued its orthopaedic activities at the centres in Beit Chebab, Sidon, Damascus and in the workshop at Hammana run by a Dutch team assisted by an ICRC orthopaedic technician.

During January and February, 43 prostheses and 26 orthopaedic appliances were manufactured. Orthopaedic consultations were also given during this period at Mreije (in the southern suburbs of Beirut) and at Falougha (Upper-Metn).

Conflict between Iraq and Iran

In January and February, the ICRC continued its visits to Iranian prisoners of war. However, it has not received permission from the Iranian authorities to resume its protection activities on behalf of Iraqi prisoners of war, which were suspended by Iran on 10 October 1984.

From 13 January to 10 February, ICRC delegates in Iraq visited 9 camps and 4 hospitals where they saw 9,847 Iranian prisoners of war and registered 27 new Iranian prisoners of war. In the course of that complete series of visits, books and leisure items worth 232,000 Swiss francs were distributed to the prisoners.

In January and February, 89,601 family messages between Iranian prisoners of war and their families, and 187,187 family messages between Iraqi prisoners of war and their families were exchanged.

In addition, ICRC delegates visited the military hospital in Tamuz on 10 January where they saw 97 former Iraqi prisoners of war, who had been repatriated by the ICRC in co-operation with the Turkish Red Crescent Society on 15 December 1985. From 16 to 20 February, ICRC delegates visited Iranian civilians from Khuzistan, interned in the Missan region. There the delegates passed on 1,200 family messages from Iran.

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

After fighting broke out on 13 January in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the ICRC offered its services to the competent authorities with the aim of providing protection and assistance to the victims. On 27 January, the ICRC was authorized to send a team. The next day, 4 delegates, one of them a doctor, arrived in the capital of South Yemen from Djibouti, from where a team which had arrived on 20 January provided them with logistic support until 26 February. The ICRC team in Aden was steadily reinforced until it comprised 17 members.

The first medical team (a medical co-ordinator and a surgical team) arrived in Aden on 28 January. It was replaced on 4 February by a team of 4 persons from the Swedish Red Cross which performed, together with local staff, 29 operations at the Al-Gumhuriah hospital in Aden. Visits were carried out to 15 other hospitals in the districts of Aden, Lahej and Abyan in order to find

serious cases requiring transfer to the Al-Gumhuriah hospital and to deliver emergency medical supplies in accordance with needs. At the request of South Yemen surgeons, courses were given in war surgery, anaesthesia and the external reduction of fractures. Beginning on 5 February, a physiotherapist helped to draw up a rehabilitation plan for the wounded and gave courses on post-operative physiotherapy and treatment for hemiplegics and paraplegics.

An ICRC team specialized in environmental health endeavoured to ensure the supply of drinking water and organize the cleaning of buildings and fresh-water springs in the areas affected by fighting. All of the equipment necessary for carrying out this task was handed over to the South Yemen authorities, and a course on hygiene and the protection of fresh-water springs was given. By mid-February, most of the problems relating to pollution of drinking water had been solved.

As regards the activities of the Tracing Agency, ICRC delegates made an assessment of needs in conjunction with the Red Crescent Society of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. By the end of February, about 60 persons had received information on close relatives, and Red Cross messages had been exchanged. The government of South Yemen gave the National Society the task of gathering information on who had been killed during the events. The ICRC provided assistance in this task.

By the end of February, standard medical kits and other medical supplies worth a total of 100,000 Swiss francs had been distributed.
