

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

March-April 1986

Africa

Angola

The food situation in the Planalto has improved thanks to a good harvest obtained from the seed distributed by the ICRC last October. This made it possible to reduce the assistance programme: the number of persons assisted by the ICRC, which in January amounted to 243,000, went down to 170,000 in March and 107,000 in April, and most feeding centres in Bié province were closed down.

In spite of the overall improvement, however, the food situation is still causing concern in certain regions from which the ICRC was absent for some time, such as Katchiungo (where the ICRC resumed its activities in March) and Girendembe (Huambo province), where a number of feeding centres had to be set up.

In addition, the ICRC medical team continued implementing the training programme for personnel attached to dispensaries in the townships in the Planalto, evacuating wounded or seriously ill persons to hospital in the provinces, and providing care to displaced persons. As regards orthopaedic rehabilitation, 56 amputees were fitted with prostheses and 465 crutches were repaired at the Bomba Alta centre run by a prosthetist and an orthopaedist from the ICRC.

The ICRC also organized a family visit to a South African officer detained by the Angolan authorities. The visit took place on 14 March, in the presence of a delegate. It must be noted that despite the delegation's repeated requests, the ICRC was not able to visit the prisoner in question in accordance with the usual criteria.

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On 13 March, four persons held by UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)—two Brazilians and two Portuguese—were released under the auspices of the ICRC and flown to Johannesburg, where they were handed over to their respective consular representatives.

In addition, on 20 March the ICRC supervised the transfer from Kinshasa to Lisbon of 196 persons who had been captured and then released by UNITA. Most of them have gone back to their countries of origin.

Ethiopia

During March and April the Ethiopian Red Cross and the ICRC, in their joint rescue operation (JRO), concentrated on a programme of distributing seed and farming tools. The operation was started and supervised by an ICRC agronomist. In April approximately 800 tonnes of seed, as well as a number of hoes and sickles, were distributed to about 225,000 persons. Wishing to provide the seed best suited to local conditions, the ICRC bought locally all those necessary for the operation.

Both in March and April about 3,300 tonnes of relief supplies were distributed to almost 350,000 persons in the provinces of Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo and Hararge. The ICRC medical team continued to monitor the nutritional situation of the population in the zone covered by the JRO. The situation had improved somewhat, and the trend was continuing.

In its tracing activities, the ICRC continued to present unaccompanied children at the feeding centres during relief distributions. Many of the children were recognized and have been reunited with their families.

Sudan

Since the beginning of the year, the ICRC has endeavoured to obtain the necessary safety guarantees to expand its humanitarian activities in southern Sudan, where the situation worsened during the months of March and April. After numerous contacts with the two parties to the conflict and the neighbouring countries, an assessment mission was carried out in northern Kenya at the end of March. Relief supplies were then taken to that area and distributed to about 3,000 displaced persons whose health and living conditions were judged to put them at high risk.

Somalia

From 28 to 30 April, three delegates and a doctor from the ICRC carried out medical visits to a total of 212 prisoners of war, including a Cuban prisoner, in three places of detention (Mogadishu central prison, Gezira camp and Laanta Buur prison). However, the delegates were not able to interview the prisoners without witnesses, as provided for in Article 126 of the Third Convention.

Nigeria

A new ICRC regional delegation was opened in Lagos on 10 March. It covers Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Latin America

Guatemala

The deputy delegate-general for Latin America carried out a mission to Guatemala from 19 to 24 March to submit to its authorities an offer of services regarding the protection of persons detained for security reasons and the dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law, mainly among the armed forces.

The ICRC representative had talks with the Head of State, President Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mario Quiñonez Amezcuita, and the President of the Guatemalan Red Cross. The mission also provided the opportunity to broach the subject of a possible ratification by Guatemala of the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions.

Peru

During March and April there was an important development concerning the ICRC's protection activities on behalf of persons detained for security reasons: after the meeting on 12 March with all the members of the armed forces' joint command, the ICRC was authorized definitively to extend its visits to civilian and military places of detention in the regions where a state of emergency has been declared. The Peruvian Head of State had already given his agreement in principle in November 1985. Visits thus began on 2 April, first in the town of Ayacucho and then in the region of the same name, to about 15 places of detention.

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During the same period the ICRC continued its visits to persons detained for security reasons in *Chile, Nicaragua, Peru* and *El Salvador*, and carried out another series of visits in *Paraguay*.

The ICRC also continued its assistance programmes in Nicaragua and El Salvador on behalf of the civilian population affected by the conflict situations prevailing in those two countries. In view of the expansion of its assistance activities in the Rio Coco region in north-east Nicaragua, the ICRC opened an office at Puerto Cabezas, where a number of ICRC delegates will be permanently based. At the end of April, aid consisting of food, blankets, clothing, soap and cooking utensils was distributed for the first time to the persons displaced in that region.

Lastly, as part of the orthopaedic programme that the ICRC is developing in Nicaragua, in co-operation with the Ministry of Health, training courses for local staff began officially on 4 April.

Asia

Conflict in Afghanistan

Mission to Kabul

From 6 to 10 April, the delegate-general for Asia and the Pacific, accompanied by a delegate and a doctor from the ICRC, went to Kabul for talks with high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the senior members of the Afghan Red Crescent Society. These talks, as well as visits to different hospital establishments, made it possible to fix a broad outline of ICRC protection activities on behalf of prisoners and of ICRC assistance (chiefly medical) in Afghanistan. It was the ICRC's first mission to Kabul since October 1982.

Internment in Switzerland

The eleventh Soviet prisoner, the last one still in Switzerland, came to the end of his period of internment and was repatriated to the Soviet Union on 26 March, after he had confirmed that he wished to return to his country of origin.

Activities in Pakistan

At the end of April, the delegate-general for Asia went to Pakistan to review the situation with the delegation based there. During his stay, he was received on 29 April in Islamabad by Mr. Niaz Nalik, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to whom he gave a general account of the ICRC's activities in Pakistan in connection with the Afghan conflict.

During March and April the number of wounded admitted to the surgical hospital in Peshawar (North West Frontier Province) remained high. It had been fairly stable in March, but in April there was a sharp increase of admissions on account of the fighting in Paktia. Admissions of war wounded amounted to 172 in March, and 192 in April. The number of operations performed was also high—385 in March and 413 in April. The surgical hospital at Quetta (Baluchistan province), where activities had been steady and calm for several months, also started admitting higher numbers of wounded—57 in March and 78 in April. In addition, 144 operations were performed there in March and 131 in April.

Mobile first-aid units run by the Pakistani Red Crescent with the support of the ICRC, continued to evacuate wounded persons

to hospitals in Peshawar and Quetta and to give first-aid treatment to war wounded. In March, the Badini post was reopened after the usual closure during the winter months, and a seventh post was installed, for a trial six-month period, in the Dalbandi/Chagai region in the province of Baluchistan. There has been intensified activity in this field, too: mobile first-aid teams treated 299 war wounded and transported 266 of them to hospital (148 war wounded in April alone).

The rehabilitation centre for paraplegics admitted 23 new patients in March and 17 in April, and the orthopaedic workshop fitted 55 war amputees with prostheses during the same period.

Moreover, the ICRC continued its training programme regarding first aid and the dissemination of knowledge of the basic rules of humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross.

Burma

Dr. Gallino, member of the ICRC and head of the "Special Fund for the Disabled", accompanied by the regional delegate based in New Delhi, went to Rangoon to take part in the inauguration, on 3 March, of the programme for amputees. The programme, set up jointly by the Burma Red Cross, the Ministry of Health and the ICRC, aims to train local staff in physiotherapy and the manufacture of prostheses. During his mission, Dr. Gallino met the Minister for Health and the senior members of the National Society.

Viet Nam

On 24 April 185 persons were able to return to Taiwan, via Bangkok on a flight from Ho Chi Minh City organized by the ICRC. Since 1976, 5,610 persons have gone back to Taiwan under the auspices of the ICRC.

Indonesia

A series of visits to persons held in connection with the situation in East Timor was carried out from 26 February to 10 March. The

ICRC delegates, including a doctor who had come from Geneva for that purpose, visited two places of detention in Dili and two prisons in Jakarta. The delegates had access to 209 detainees in all (166 in Dili and 43 in Jakarta).

Following the agreement reached under the auspices of the United Nations, between the Indonesian and Portuguese Governments, the ICRC was officially mandated by the latter bodies to organize the repatriation to Portugal of former Portuguese officials still in East Timor. Two groups had already been repatriated in January and February, and the third group, comprising 28 persons, reached Portugal under the auspices of the ICRC on 11 April.

Furthermore, a series of visits to persons detained following the attempted coup d'état in September 1965 (category Ex-G.30.S/PKI) was started on 25 March and scheduled to continue until the end of May. Previous visits to this category of prisoners were made in 1983.

Middle East

Conflict between Iran and Iraq

In March and April, the ICRC continued its visits to Iranian prisoners of war interned in Iraq, but was still unable to resume its protection activities on behalf of Iraqi prisoners of war in Iran, which were suspended by Iran on 10 October 1984.

From 3 to 31 March, the ICRC delegates visited 9887 Iranian prisoners of war in 9 camps and 4 military hospitals in Iraq. Another series of visits to the same prisoners started on 21 April.

During March and April, 117,290 family messages between Iranian prisoners of war and their families and 262,521 messages between Iraqi prisoners of war and their families were exchanged.
