

PRESIDENTIAL MISSIONS

The missions which took ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga to Great Britain, France, Jordan and the United States in February and early March 1991 were part of the effort to mobilize humanitarian aid to meet the immediate needs of the victims of the Middle East conflict and its aftermath.

During the same period the President also carried out official visits in Switzerland, Italy and Brazil.

Great Britain (5-8 February)

On 5 February 1991 President Sommaruga travelled to London at the invitation of the British Government. He was accompanied by Mr. Michel Convers, head of the Operational Support Department, Mr. Paul Grossrieder, Deputy Director of Operations, and Mr. Hans-Peter Gasser, Legal Adviser to the ICRC.

The Middle East conflict and its repercussions in humanitarian terms were the central theme of talks between the ICRC delegation and the British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, the Minister of Defence, Mr. Tom King, and the Foreign Minister, Mr. Douglas Hurd. Among matters discussed was the plight of British and Allied prisoners of war in Iraqi hands, and of Iraqi prisoners in Allied hands. The ICRC's operations in Africa were the subject of an exchange of views with the Minister for Overseas Development, Mrs. Lynda Chalker.

The financing of the ICRC's headquarters and field budgets was also discussed. The Foreign Minister announced that a special contribution of £ 2,500,000 would be made to the ICRC for the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the Middle East.

While in London, the ICRC President visited the headquarters of the British Red Cross, which had prepared a three-part programme for the occasion. First was a symposium on international humanitarian law

for members of the legal and medical professions, at which the ICRC representatives and members of the British Red Cross spoke. Then there was a presentation of the activities of the British Red Cross, especially its London Committee. Finally, several working sessions were held with Lady Limerick, Chairman of the British Red Cross, and leading staff members on questions of common interest, including the forthcoming International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

On 6 February, the ICRC President was invited by the Royal Institute of International Affairs to give a lecture entitled "Humanitarian conscience in international relations: the mandate and action of the ICRC". Mr Sommaruga also took part in television and radio broadcasts and gave a press conference for about forty journalists of the British and foreign press.

France (13 and 14 February)

Accompanied by Mr. Michel Convers and by Mr. François Bugnion, Deputy Director of the Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, the ICRC President was received on 13 February by the President of the Republic, Mr. François Mitterrand, the Prime Minister, Mr. Michel Rocard, the Minister-Delegate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Edwige Avice, the Secretary of State attached to the Ministry of Defence, Mr. Gérard Renon, and the Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Bernard Kouchner.

All those who took part in the talks, which focused on the humanitarian implications of the Middle East conflict, expressed their concern for the plight of civilians and stressed the necessity for strict compliance with international humanitarian law in that respect. The French government representatives were particularly interested in the ICRC's plans and initial operations to bring assistance to civilians.

The discussions also covered prisoners of war, the dissemination of international humanitarian law, and the question of France's ratification of Additional Protocol I. The French contribution to the ICRC budgets was also examined.

The ICRC President was received at the headquarters of the French Red Cross by its President, Mrs. Georgina Dufoix, who had also accompanied him in his visits to the French authorities. Talks between them mainly concerned the forthcoming International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Mr. Sommaruga gave a press conference attended by about fifty journalists, and spoke on television.

Jordan (16 and 17 February)

On 16 February Mr. Sommaruga, accompanied by Mr. François Bugnion, arrived in Jordan in order to examine with the Jordanian authorities the humanitarian problems arising from the conflict in the Middle East.

The ICRC delegation, including Mr. Werner Kaspar, head of the ICRC delegation in Amman, was received by H.R.H. Crown Prince Hassan, H.M. Queen Nour, H.R.H. Princess Sarwath, Mr. Salam Hammad, Deputy Minister of the Interior, and Dr. Ahmad Abu-Goura, President of the Jordanian Red Crescent. The delegation also had talks with Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Mr. Al-Weis, the Iraqi Ambassador.

All those present at the discussions showed great concern for the plight of civilians and agreed that means must be sought to improve their situation. It was recommended that the parties to the conflict establish health and safety zones and centres and conclude agreements for their recognition. Mention was also made of possible agreements relating to the protection of hospitals. It was likewise emphasized that the parties should respect sites of religious significance.

The condition of prisoners of war in the hands of the various belligerents was discussed. Prince Hassan stated that his country, as a neutral power, was willing to receive sick and wounded prisoners of both sides, in accordance with Articles 109 to 117 of the Third Geneva Convention.

The ICRC promised to offer its good offices to the parties in this respect.

At the end of his mission, the ICRC President gave a press conference for more than 100 journalists from the Jordanian press and from international organizations.

Switzerland (25 February)

Visiting Bern on 25 February, President Sommaruga was received by the President of the Swiss Confederation and head of the Federal Department of the Interior, Mr. Flavio Cotti, the head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. René Felber, and the head of the

Federal Military Department, Mr. Kaspar Villiger. Mr. Sommaruga was accompanied by Mr. Claudio Caratsch, Vice-President, Mr. Guy Deluz, Director-General, Mr. Jean de Courten, Director of Operations, and Mr. Yves Sandoz, Director for Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement. Mr. Michel Convers, Mr. Jean-Claude Hefti and Mr. Jürg Bischoff were also present.

The ICRC representatives held a working session with a delegation from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, chaired by H.E. Ambassador Jean-Pierre Keusch, Director of the Division for International Organizations.

The discussions between the ICRC and the Swiss authorities centred on the humanitarian problems arising from the Middle East conflict, and from other conflicts such as those in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. They also covered the financing of ICRC activities and the forthcoming International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. In the field of humanitarian law, the participants discussed the setting-up of the International Fact-Finding Commission, as provided for in Article 90 of Protocol I, and ways to ensure that new weapons conformed with international humanitarian law.

The President of the ICRC gave a press conference for some forty journalists accredited to Bern, and delivered a lecture entitled "Diplomatie als Mittel zum humanitären Eingreifen: die Aktion des IKRK heute" to the Swiss Association for Foreign Policy.

Italy (26 and 27 February)

At the invitation of the *Italian Society for International Organization*, the ICRC President visited Rome on 26 and 27 February. He was accompanied by Mr. Francis Amar, Deputy Delegate General for Europe and North America.

In talks with leading officials of the Italian Red Cross on 26 February, Mr. Sommaruga gave an extensive overview of the activities undertaken by the Movement and especially by the ICRC in connection with the Middle East conflict and in other troubled areas of the world. Among the subjects raised were the statutes of the Italian Red Cross, and the provision of personnel for ICRC operations.

In the evening of the same day, the ICRC President gave a lecture in Italian to the *Italian Society for International Organization*, entitled "Humanitarian diplomacy: a field of endeavour for the ICRC". The large audience included foreign diplomats, representatives of the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, leading members of academic circles, high-ranking military officers and journalists.

During his stay in Rome, Mr. Sommaruga had talks with several members of the Italian government: Mr. V. Rognoni, Minister of Defence, Mrs Susanna Agnelli, Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Giulio Andreotti, President of the Council of Ministers. The main topics discussed were the Movement's activities in the Middle East, the dissemination of humanitarian law among the armed forces, the Italian government's financial contribution to ICRC activities and the future of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo.

In addition to these meetings, the President of the ICRC gave a number of interviews to the press.

Brazil (4-6 March)

At the invitation of the Brazilian Government, Mr. Sommaruga, accompanied by Mr. Jean-Marc Bornet, Delegate General for Latin America, and Mr. Christophe Swinarski, regional delegate in Buenos Aires, travelled to Brazil on 4 March for a two-day visit.

On 4 March he had a meeting in Brasilia with the General Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic, H.E. Ambassador Marcos Coimbra, at which they discussed questions of mutual interest and the situation in the Middle East.

The ICRC President was received by leading members of the Federal Senate and Chamber of Deputies. His talks at the National Congress covered the progress made in legislative terms towards ratification of the Additional Protocols, and with the headquarters agreement on the setting-up of a new ICRC regional delegation in Brasilia.

Mr. Sommaruga then had an interview with the President of the Republic, Mr. Fernando Collor de Mello. On two matters there was complete agreement between the two men: the opening of an ICRC regional delegation in Brazil, with the conclusion of a headquarters agreement, and the need to speed up the process of ratification of the Additional Protocols. The President of the Brazilian Red Cross, Mrs. Mavy Harmon, took part in the discussions.

On 5 March, during an official ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ICRC President and H.E. Ambassador Marcos Castriota de Azambuja, Acting Minister for Foreign Relations, signed the headquarters agreement for the new ICRC delegation in Brasilia.

After the signing ceremony, Mr. Sommaruga had a working meeting with the heads of various departments of the Foreign Ministry on problems of common interest.

The day ended with a press conference attended by all the main Brazilian media and representatives of foreign press agencies.

On 6 March President Sommaruga went to Rio de Janeiro, where he visited the Brazilian Red Cross headquarters.

This mission marked a significant step forward in relations between the ICRC and Brazil and opened up new prospects for ICRC presence and activities in the country.

United States (7 and 8 March)

On 8 March, the ICRC President was the guest of the President of the United States, Mr. George Bush. During an interview at the White House, also attended by Mrs. Elizabeth Dole, President of the American Red Cross, Mr. Bush thanked Mr. Sommaruga for the work undertaken by the ICRC in connection with the Middle East conflict. They then broached the main questions relating to the application of humanitarian law in times of armed conflict, examining in particular measures to be taken to ensure that the law was respected and given a prime place in the “new world order”, as a factor for peace.

The situation in Israel and the occupied territories was discussed, as was the position of the American administration with regard to Additional Protocol I. The President of the ICRC also took the opportunity to give the US President a general overview of the humanitarian activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross around the world.

Later, Mr. Sommaruga, who was accompanied by Mr. Jean de Courten, Director of Operations, and Mr. Jean-Paul Fallet and Mr. Fred Isler from the New York delegation, had talks with General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The discussions focused on the situation in the Middle East and respect for and dissemination of international humanitarian law.

The ICRC delegation was also able to discuss these matters with leading representatives of the State Department, in particular the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Lawrence Eagleburger, and members of the US Congress.

The same day, the ICRC President visited the President of the American Red Cross, Mrs. Elizabeth Dole, to review a number of aspects of the cooperation between the National Society and the ICRC.

On 7 March, Mr. Sommaruga had talks in New York with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and with the Austrian Ambassador to the UN, Mr. P. Hohenfellner, who was at the time President of the UN Security Council and Chairman of the Sanctions Committee.
