

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Visits by Heads of State to the ICRC

● *VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC*

Mr. Raúl Alfonsín, President of the Argentine Republic, visited ICRC headquarters on 10 June. He was received by Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the ICRC, accompanied by members of the International Committee and the Directorate. Several representatives of the City and Canton of Geneva were also present.

In his welcoming speech, Mr. Sommaruga praised the Argentine head of state as a staunch defender of human rights. He spoke of the close relations which existed between the ICRC and Argentina during a painful recent period of that country's history. For example, the ICRC visited up to 4,000 security detainees in Argentina, bringing them solace and an opportunity to communicate with their families. Mr. Sommaruga also recalled that during the South Atlantic conflict, ICRC delegates provided medical and other help to thousands of prisoners before they were repatriated. Mr. Alfonsín's Government was praised for its recent ratification of the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions which were adopted ten years ago. Mr. Sommaruga also paid tribute to the excellent work of Argentine Red Cross volunteers.

In his reply, the Argentine President declared that he had come to ICRC headquarters to express his country's gratitude toward the institution both for what it had accomplished in the wake of excesses committed under the military regime and for its work during the South Atlantic conflict. The ICRC's activities contributed to safeguarding basic human values, he said. Although it was not always possible to reach the objective, for example finding someone who has disappeared, the ICRC would always be able to count on Argentina's support in its undertakings.

During his visit, Mr. Alfonsín was accompanied by several senior Argentine officials including Mr. Dante Caputo, his Minis-

ter of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Leopoldo Tettamanti, Argentina's Permanent Representative to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva.

The visit ended with a private meeting between Mr. Alfonsín and Mr. Sommaruga.

● *VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC*

Mr. Mario Soares, President of the Portuguese Republic, was received at ICRC headquarters on 16 June by President Sommaruga and members of the International Committee and the Directorate. The Vice-President of the Geneva State Council and the Mayor of Geneva were also present, as was Mr. Enrique de la Mata, the President of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

In his welcoming speech, President Sommaruga hailed Mr. Soares as a statesman who had fought for social justice and respect for human dignity and had himself suffered political detention and exile. Mr. Sommaruga spoke of the ICRC's work in situations of armed conflict and those of internal disturbances and tension and mentioned that it was the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Additional Protocols.

In his reply, Mr. Soares expressed his esteem and gratitude for the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in general and that of the ICRC in particular. He emphasized the latter's activities in aid of prisoners and victims of conflicts in former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. He also spoke in favour of his Government ratifying the Protocols.

Mr. Soares was accompanied during his visit by several senior Portuguese officials including Ambassador Antonio Costa Lobo, Portuguese Permanent Representative to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva.

The visit ended with a private meeting between Mr. Soares and Mr. Sommaruga.

● *VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO*

The President of the People's Republic of the Congo and current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Denis

Sassou Nguesso, and Madame Sassou Nguesso, visited the headquarters of the ICRC on 9 July. They were received by the ICRC President, Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga.

His Excellency Sassou Nguesso, accompanied by two members of his Government, discussed various humanitarian issues of particular concern to Africa during a private meeting with Mr. Sommaruga and senior ICRC officials.

The OAU's Council of Ministers adopted in July 1986, for the first time in its history, a resolution expressing the support of Africans for the humanitarian work carried out by the ICRC. The resolution called on OAU Member States to assist the ICRC in its work by granting it all the necessary means to fulfil its mandate, as defined by the Geneva Conventions (see *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 254, September-October 1986, pp. 296-297).

President Sommaruga emphasized that Africa is at present the main area for ICRC activities, both from the point of view of the number of armed conflicts, internal troubles or tensions requiring its intervention, and the number of people operating in the field.

The ICRC has delegations in 14 African countries, with 176 delegates and several hundred locally-recruited employees.