

ON BEHALF OF POLITICAL DETAINEES IN GREECE

It is known that following on events which took place in Greece in April 1967, the International Committee of the Red Cross intervened on behalf of political detainees and was thus able to undertake a humanitarian action which the International Review has described on several occasions¹. It has been considered of interest to mention certain facts on the subject and show the present position.

Political detainees in Greece are of two categories:

- “ administrative ” deportees, who were arrested on the night of 20/21 April 1967, and deprived of their freedom for an indeterminate period;
- persons arrested after 21 April 1967 awaiting trial or sentenced for attempted subversion of the State.

Less than one month after the change of the government, the ICRC was authorized to visit the first category of detainees on the island of Yaros, and subsequently those on the island of Leros. In January 1968 this permission was extended to include visits to persons charged and sentenced in prisons for political offenders.

Enquiries have been undertaken regularly by ICRC delegates into the treatment to which detainees are subject from the moment of their arrest. Interviews without witnesses have taken place in all detention centres in order to gather objective information. The results of these conversations have been included in confidential reports which were, as usual, sent to the government,

¹ In its October 1968 issue, in particular.

Persons accused of or sentenced for political offences are subject to control by the Ministry of Justice and to the same penal conditions as apply to common law prisoners.

“ Administrative ” deportees come under the control of the Ministry of Public Order. Originally they were sent either to the island of Yaros (Cyclades) and the island of Leros (Dodecanese). Since the day of their exile, their number has continually decreased. At the beginning of 1968 they still numbered a little over 2,300. Following agreements between the ICRC and the Greek government, the island of Yaros was evacuated completely in October 1968 and 400 sick or aged detainees were unconditionally released. At present there are 140 women interned at Alikarnassos near Heraklion in Crete whilst men are detained at Leros Lakki, Leros Partheni and at the Oropos camp in Attica.

The ICRC delegation, led by Mr. Laurent Marti, regularly visited these camps and talked in private unrestrictedly with detainees of its own choice. Deportees' complaints were first conveyed to the authorities who, in a number of cases, took immediate remedial action. The reports sent from Geneva were also studied and discussed.

The ICRC obtained permission to set up at the Hellenic Red Cross headquarters a bureau for the benefit of detainees' families. All demands of a humanitarian or family nature are recorded and medicines are distributed against presentation of a doctor's prescription. In 1968 some 2,000 families were received and listened to at the ICRC office.

In 1968, the Greek authorities followed the ICRC's recommendations in the following main fields:

- complete evacuation of Yaros camp
- release of 400 sick and aged detainees
- increase in mail sent
- considerable increase in size of grounds for exercise
- organization of regular family visits
- distribution of clothing, food and medical supplies.

In addition, a considerable number of internal improvements were possible.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

It must be borne in mind that there is no convention authorizing ICRC delegates to visit political detainees. Such visits depend entirely on the good will of the government. Nevertheless, the International Committee of the Red Cross only agrees to undertake such missions provided it is allowed to do so without restriction and to act in keeping with its traditional humanitarian principles. It demands the right to be able to interview detainees of its own choice without witnesses. It is gratified to note that these principles have so far been respected by the Greek government and that several recommendations have been implemented.
