

HUMAN NEEDS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The General Conference of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) meets every third year. The last one was held in London in June 1968. The theme of the Conference was "Human Needs and Social Justice". This involved discussion of such important subjects as "Refugee Problems" and "Development Assistance" which are of concern to private voluntary organizations, intergovernmental institutions and the Red Cross. This is shown by the participation in working groups of the Secretary General of the League of Red Cross Societies, who delivered an introductory paper on emergency relief, and of Mr. P. C. Stanissis, in charge of League disaster preparedness planning, who addressed the meeting on co-ordination of relief in disaster.

ICVA Documents devoted a special number to this Conference.¹ It gives a summary of the main papers after the session was opened by Conference President Wilhelm S. Boe, who in his statement stressed that "Governments must understand that the role of the voluntary agencies is to supplement governmental and intergovernmental effort and not to substitute for it". The extracts given below from some of the papers delivered will show readers what problems of the day were considered.

H.E. Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster. — The problem of want is a universal problem. It affects us all because we are all members of one family. Who is my neighbour? The quick answer is every one—every one without exception. Not merely those who share my religion or are the same colour or have the same political views. The fact that we are all children of God means that we are all brothers.

This has a significance even for those who will not accept the religious idea or even admit the brotherhood of man. The fact is

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that this is a shrinking world. We are not so much next-to-door neighbours as all living in one house. The speed of travel is so great that it is virtually impossible to escape from one another even if we wanted to. It is therefore a matter of self-interest even if we are not capable of higher motives to come to the rescue of those in want.

Mr. A. H. Boerma, Director General of the FAO. — As Director-General of FAO, I am exceedingly conscious of the importance of combining all the efforts, all the resources, all the vigour of which mankind is capable if the challenge of development is to be met. In those matters for which FAO has a direct concern food production, conservation, distribution and use, the raising of standards of nutrition and the complex problems of agricultural and rural development—we are well aware that our resources are too small and our progress too slow. We know also that the programs of governments have so far fallen short of what is needed in this sector and in others. And, recognizing that we deal only with one sector of the development front—though we believe a vital one—we know that success will come only through a massive world-wide effort in which all parts of society, national and international, must take an active part.

Dr. Malcolm Adiseshiah, Deputy Director General of UNESCO. — I believe that education has a key role, a causal one in development and have attempted to demonstrate this truth in various ways. Briefly, education promotes development in two ways, which are part of the growth component of the development equation. First, education provides the specific skills needed for the proper performance of a number of occupations. Second, it creates, influences and conditions the socio-cultural framework which is an indispensable element of the infrastructure for development.

Mr. Ivan Lansberg Henriquez, President of the Dividendo Voluntario para la Comunidad, Venezuela. — Our world is being challenged by a situation of growing inequity and we are awakening to this fact. Social Justice has become indivisible and there can be only one rational answer to this critical challenge—the answer is Development.

Development, of course, is not merely economic growth. It is economic growth combined with structural change. It integrates

volume with equilibrium, quantity with quality, and its essential final objective is the development of human beings and of their ways of communicating, finding values and meaningful work, loving and living together. It has less to do with the things that can be measured than with those that cannot.

Mr. Ernst Michanek, Director General of the Swedish International Development Authority. — The experience gained over these years has shown that the world's population problem has qualitative as well as quantitative aspects. Qualitative, because so much remains to be done in the way of finding new and better family planning methods; quantitative, because so large resources in manpower and supply will be needed. Global problems require global efforts if they are to be solved.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. — Now, I turn to the problem of assistance. What are the main differences between Europe, Africa and Asia? Well, in Europe I think we all agree that we deal with refugees as individuals. In Africa and Asia we are dealing with refugees in groups of people for whom it is absolutely impossible to conduct individual eligibility, when deciding whether or not they, as individuals one by one, are to be granted refugee status. They are people for whom speedy relief is essential because they have fled from one country in Africa to another, arriving totally destitute and therefore are in dire need of food, medicaments, blankets, because they have been forced to flee without having time to take anything with them. Now maybe the methods are different, but the aim remains the same, we must help these people cease to be refugees. We must ensure that they can start living a normal life, either through voluntary repatriation, through local integration or else through resettlement.

Mr. Dramane Ouattara, Organization of African Unity. — The refugee problem is universal; it is not peculiar to Africa. In fact, it existed long before the International Community began to get organized and to concern itself with the question. However, it must be recognized that in Africa the refugee problem today is particularly acute. In Africa today there are nearly one and a half million refugees.

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Mr. Walter M. Besterman, Deputy Director of ICEM. — Much has been done, much remains to be done. There are no limits to this vast humanitarian problem. But I firmly believe that our organizations, working closely together, with a common and humanitarian aim, can do much to ensure that the fundamental right to Freedom of Movement is one that will not be denied any refugee because of lack of international organization and financing. In extending our services to meet the human needs of these people, we are not only saving concern, uncertainty, and even despair, on their part, but we also directly assist those governments whose countries, for geographical reasons, have borne, and may well continue to bear, the burden of considerable influx of refugees.

As we have already said, Mr. P. C. Stanassis addressed the meeting on "Planning and Co-ordination of Red Cross Relief", in which he said:

Disaster relief is one of the fundamental duties of a National Red Cross Society, but it is never solely the responsibility of the Red Cross. The government of every country retains the basic responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and the role of the Red Cross is as its auxiliary. Major disasters resulting in international appeals for assistance have been repeatedly occurring. National Red Cross Societies have tended to look more and more for help from sister Societies, national and international voluntary organisations.

It is true, however, that there is an inherent goodwill in mankind which crops up in disaster time and makes people rush and help our fellow-men in distress. It is marvellous, and a fact, that many being near a disaster theatre instinctively employ the utmost of their skill and resources. Experience has shown, however, that as long as there is not an organisation, trained personnel working according to a previously prepared plan, directing, co-ordinating and controlling the action, the result to a certain extent is delay, misuse, confusion, duplication, and in many cases tragedy. This is being more and more recognised many times all over the world and in different circumstances. It is realised that efficient help cannot be given by hurried plans, plans which were prepared under tension during an emergency situation. Pre-disaster preparedness is more and more

necessary before emergencies arise. Today, we at the Red Cross have focused our energy not only by giving aid to victims but by helping people not to become victims.

International and national organisations interested in disaster relief and rehabilitation have, especially during recent years, given particular attention to the problems of how to prevent or diminish the catastrophic effect of natural disasters. This activity has been intensified by the fact that experiences from a series of disasters which have caused great loss of life, illnesses and heavy material losses, have shown that the relief and rehabilitation efforts have, in many cases, failed due to both the absence of previously established relief plans and to the lack of co-ordination of relief actions. This has emphasized the obvious need of better preparations which must be considered systematically by all organisations likely to be involved in relief programmes, both on the international and national levels.

Among organisations for which this has been a matter of serious concern are the United Nations and some of its Specialised Agencies, international non-governmental voluntary organisations having disaster relief as one of the main parts of their programme, the League of Red Cross Societies (the federation of the 109 Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies), and numerous national organisations, governmental and private, which are active in this field.

Within the United Nations "family" discussions and studies in this field had been carried out by different units within the Secretariat interested in relief and technical assistance, and by a number of the Specialised Agencies such as WHO, FAO, World Food Programme, etc. The result of these deliberations, expressed in a special report from the United Nations Secretary-General, and in other papers, was presented to the Economic and Social Council, where important decisions were taken. Finally, the General Assembly passed a resolution (2034 (XX)) "Assistance in Case of Natural Disasters".

This Resolution in particular invited Member States "to consider the advisability of setting up appropriate national planning and operating a machinery most suited to their conditions, and designed to determine the degree and character of the relief required

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and to give unified direction to relief operations . . .". It further indicated " that, in co-operation with the League of Red Cross Societies, the United Nations can offer both guidance and technical assistance in formulating pre-disaster plans to countries requesting it . . .".

At the request of the Council of Europe, the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies was requested to help in the preparatory work with the elaboration of a working paper on disaster relief which will be presented to the next session of the Council of Europe to be held from the 1st to the 5th of April 1968.

The indispensable pre-disaster planning is a project to which increasing attention should be devoted. Therefore in a country lacking it the government should set up national machinery to draw up a plan, allot responsibility in advance and, at the time of a calamity, co-ordinate as far as possible both internal and external assistance.

The National Disaster Relief Plan (Law, Administration Order or the like) should assign specific duties to the different bodies likely to be involved in a relief operation—army, police, public services, Red Cross Society, Civil Defence, national and international voluntary organisations, according to their individual character and specialisations and the personnel and material of which they dispose.

Overall responsibility for relief operations should be assigned in each country according to its traditions and social structures. In some cases it would fall to the government, in others it would be entrusted to the National Red Cross Society, or to Civil Defence, or in others still, a National Disaster Relief Committee would be constituted representing the various bodies referred to above, including, of course, the Red Cross Society.

Whatever the solution adopted, the appointed Central Authority should:

- Direct Disaster Relief Services' activities throughout the country and
- Co-ordinate both internal and external assistance.

The standing machinery is overwhelmingly the most important factor in the disaster relief plan and consequently in the structure of co-ordination. Its duty is to make an accurate assessment of

needs and a progressive evaluation of the extent to which they are covered by the resources of member bodies or those on which they can rely.

International organisations, on both governmental and non-governmental levels, governments and all those desiring to join the relief action should apply to the national counterpart for information, and to advise it of the type of emergency they are in a position to offer. This might represent an important contribution to the better co-ordination of aid.

As for the international non-governmental organisations active in disaster relief, informal consultation and exchange of information has been taking place on an increasing scale, in spite of the rather large numbers concerned. Some of them are currently studying, among other aspects of natural disaster, the question of co-ordination. The larger international non-governmental organisations have themselves, moreover, been engaged for some time past in promoting better co-ordination of the work of the constituent bodies as ICVA, the League of Red Cross Societies, etc. Furthermore, the League Secretariat has established a close collaboration with the United Nations both through the New York office and the regional office concerned, and with the interested branches of this organisation, such as the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, WHO, WMO and FAO. These contacts have been established not only by an exchange of information and division of work and mutual aid during the actual operation of relief actions, but also by consultation on principles and preparations for future disasters.

With regard to the National Disaster Relief Plan, we would like to underline that the Plan should also assign specific duties to the Red Cross Society. It is not possible to state precisely those which should apply to each Society. This will depend on the degree of development of the Society in question, its organisation, structure, normal activities, the number and qualifications of its staff and volunteers and its financial and material resources, all of which vary from country to country. However, this is no obstacle to "being prepared in advance and act when disaster strikes". The principle remains the same. The Red Cross Society must be prepared to act, because one of its fundamental duties is to assist disaster victims.

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In providing relief, the Red Cross's role is to supply the four primary emergency needs of disaster victims: food, shelter, clothing and supplementary medical aid.

We would also draw readers' attention to the paper delivered by Henrik Beer, League Secretary General, on "International Disaster Relief: New Problems, New Solutions". This is an important topic for the Red Cross movement and we therefore think it useful to give below the text as published in ICVA Documents.¹

As a subheading to this speech, the title "New problems, new solutions" has been used. Which are the new problems? Have we not always had disasters? Yes. But the world today is so different from what it was that aspects also on "classical" disasters are new. We know much more about disasters, their causes and what to do about them, and the attitude to the victims is also new.

We cannot do much about the frequency of the natural disasters. During the past ten years, the League of Red Cross Societies has had to make an international appeal every third week, specifically in the great disaster belt, through the Mediterranean basin, over the Near, Middle and Far East, and up through the island countries on Asia's East coast. Another belt spreads along the Andes; and we should not forget that on our disaster relief maps, we have countries which help themselves and do not ask for aid, but are very much disaster prone, such as the United States and the USSR.

But most of the countries in our disaster belts are underdeveloped.

That is why it is so important to be able to send trained people immediately as information and liaison officers, with vaccinations arranged, also from nations where there would be no difficulties to get visas to the countries concerned, and quickly, and ready to take the first plane to the scene of disaster. That is why it is also important that the organization concerned—I am now using an

¹ Geneva, November 1968, No. 8.

example from my own—has such liaisons with their organization on the spot, that the acceptance of such liaison officers is a point which does not have to be discussed. Therefore it is, of course, of the greatest value to have a voluntary organization attached to an international group in every country, with disaster relief as one of their programmes and if possible trained to be on the receiving end. But even in cases where this exists, the need of the outside liaison officer is great, partly because of the fact that the organizational aid itself will get, and rightly so, a priority within the country concerned, and for them the question of giving information is looked upon as a secondary item, which of course it is not if it should serve an international relief action.

The training and recruiting of such liaison officers, ready to go on a few hours' notice, is as important as the training of technicians for other purposes. We must also remember that national pride and feeling of independence make it natural that most disaster-hit countries want to have the responsibility for the leadership of the relief actions themselves, but it is much easier for them to accept someone who does not ask for any leadership, but offers only to be of aid and to channel relief from other countries.

This need for information and the moral conflict between the need to tell the truth also to have the courage of telling when information is not available, and on the other hand lose the opportunity for fund-raising on a great scale, is something quite new which we have to tackle. Moral force is also needed for the delegates and liaison officers. There can be many cases where available resources are sufficient and where international aid should not be forthcoming.

There is, however, one other problem, quite new, which has connections with what has just been said. This concerns disasters happening in countries which basically are so well organized and have such resources that they think they are able to take care of their own disasters without outside aid. They also say so. This means, for instance, that the League of Red Cross Societies has no possibilities to make an appeal; if we have a Society on the spot working in contact with its government, which says 'no appeal', there will be no appeal from our side. But this country can be so popular, there have been so many people visiting it, the pictures

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on TV screens from the scene of disaster are so appalling, that many countries want to give aid which, during an emergency period is needed, without having a direct appeal. Then it can happen, as we have had a good example of during the last period, that the League can be called in to 'co-ordinate spontaneous aid', but all too late to have any influence on where different types of aid were requested and how the aid should be directed. This is a very tricky and difficult situation. The possibilities of proper co-ordination and action are very small and also here moral courage is needed. We should never forget that this aid from affluent countries to neighbouring almost as affluent countries is something which is observed by our friends in the poor far-away countries and that they remark that it is very easy for an affluent country to get help from his friends and neighbours, and much more difficult for a far-away country to get corresponding help. We have to watch this.

But there are new aspects on problems of co-ordination which first concern the national level.

One of the things we are pushing in our activities for pre-disaster planning is the necessity of national plans. This exists in some countries but not in all.

These plans should include a clear table of responsibilities of different ministries, pointing where the basic responsibilities lie, but also of other governmental services and also pointers on the relations between central and local government. It should also include something on co-operation with non-governmental organizations and to give them the role for which their organizations in that respective country makes them specially fit. It should also be quite clear, and that we have pointed out, from the point of view of the Red Cross, that they should have the possibility to be the channel of relief from their colleagues out in the world.

It is also necessary that organizations like the National Red Cross Societies have preparations for disaster relief among their first aims, so that they can serve as channels for aid under all circumstances from their sister Societies. It is also a question of training, not only a plan on paper, and of national preparations when it comes to material, and having personnel, not only in the capital city, but all over the country. It means training courses, selection and

realistic "play acting", in order to get all participants in this to face the problems which can be theirs any moment.

Now on some problems which are new, but where work has started for a better preparedness:

On *material*: It is very good that we are able to use the IATA resolution on air transport, but this cannot be abused and resources are sometimes limited. It is therefore a moral responsibility to see to it that it is used only for those persons and supplies which are absolutely necessary and relatively easy to transport by air. This means that it is of great value if one can have heavy material closer to the scenes of action. This has been done by us, but we have to continue to work with it, by having decentralized relief depots, not containing things that can be easily destroyed, like most foods and medicaments, but heavy items such as tents and blankets, properly packed, registered and marked according to an international standard.

The training of *personnel* and their use is another new problem. We have to avoid the stream of enthusiastic, non-organized amateurs. We must remember that one thing that usually exists on every disaster spot is general non-qualified manpower.

We must cut down as much as we can on numbers and be as hard as possible on quality. Training courses will have to continue and we have to fill the gaps in fields where we have found that personnel available on short notice have lacked the necessary qualifications.

It has been pointed out in the UN Resolutions and on other occasions, that it is the basic task of the Red Cross to continue its work on disaster preparedness and planning.

We have tried to find out the status of planning in many countries. So far, around 60 Societies have answered our questions. Of these, around 25 have national disaster organizations and most of the Red Cross Societies answering are involved. We have given them information on what they can get, for instance, from the League itself and how their country can use the UN relief funds. We emphasized to the new Societies the necessity of creating relief organizations and plans.

We have equally asked National Societies about the facilities they ought to have for disaster relief purposes from their Govern-

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ments. Ninety of them have answered. 63 have one or more of the necessary facilities in form of free or reduced cost of travel and transport in the country, free visas, when necessary, free or priority telecommunications, free mail, exemption of customs for relief goods from abroad, etc. Here there remains much to be done.

There are also a number of other problems where studies have continued or begun. One, important for Europe and also other parts, is the possibility of getting tax exemption or deductions for donations for disaster relief purposes. The question of information, both scientific and more popular must also be further studied. One interesting point to be noted is that UNESCO will take over the archives and some of the duties of the since long defunct International Relief Union, which might mean that the information available can be systematically treated by experts and give hints for future work.

This list is not complete but cooperation in the field and the ad hoc contacts in Geneva during major disasters is already functioning. We cannot be too systematic here. Every situation is different. One cannot handle disaster actions by super committees and councils when every minute counts and there are always different organizations interested in different ways in different situations. But the question of preparedness is so important that it concerns us all, and I therefore hope that it will be possible to see during a not too distant future a significant break-through and that we will be able, all of us, to work in disaster relief with more confidence, safety and efficiency in the future.
