

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

Nigeria

Mention has been made in a previous number of the *International Review* that negotiations were being carried out between the Nigerian Government and the ICRC, following on that government's decision to put an end to the co-ordinating role which the International Committee had assumed for the relief action in territory under Nigerian control. At the end of August these negotiations were being pursued and we now give details of these below.

On 22 July, Mr. Enrico Bignami, special representative of the ICRC President, left Geneva for Lagos. He was directed to continue the negotiations which Mr. Marcel Naville began at the beginning of the month with the Nigerian authorities and was accompanied by Mr. Michel-Edouard Martin, adviser in the Legal Department.

The main subject of the conversations were the transfer of the ICRC's co-ordinating mission to the "Nigerian National Rehabilitation Commission".

In addition, on 1st August, the ICRC simultaneously submitted to the Nigerian Government and the Biafran authorities a plan which could reasonably be expected to permit daylight flights to Biafra.

On 5 August, Mr. Arikpo, Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, convened a meeting of representatives of the ICRC, the main donor countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the United States, Finland, Federal Republic of Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) in order to acquaint them of the Nigerian attitude to the ICRC plan.

Consequent on Mr. Arikpo's statements concerning the application of article 23 of the IVth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, the ICRC replied as follows:

"The Nigerian authorities are quite right in saying that the State which allows the free passage has the right to prescribe the technical arrangements. However, this concluding clause in article 23 should not be so construed as to vitiate the obvious general purpose of that article.

"Article 23 confers on children under 15 years of age, expectant mothers and maternity cases, the right to receive the medical and hospital stores and food supplies necessary for their survival. This right to help commits States parties to the IVth Convention not only to grant free passage of relief consignments, but to do so as rapidly as possible.

"Consequently the final clause of article 23 is not intended to prevent or delay the arrival of relief consignments. If it were, it would invalidate the whole humanitarian purpose of the article."

The President of the ICRC went to Algiers on 22 July, where he met Colonel Boumedienne, Acting Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Mr. Naville explained to him the ICRC's position with regard to the relief operations in Nigeria and in Biafra.

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As regards the food and medical situation in secessionist territory (Biafra), Mr. K.-H. Jaggi, head of the ICRC delegation, gave the following information to the ICRC at the beginning of August:

"The controversy which has arisen about the food situation in Biafra calls for some clarification of the information which has been issued on this subject. Generally speaking, it must be admitted that the food situation over the last few months has not reached the alarming level of last year, when thousands of people were daily dying of starvation.

In January it was estimated that during the period preceding the harvest (June and July) a minimum of 500 tons of food should reach Biafra each day in order to avoid disaster. In April and May the situation was fairly satisfactory as it was possible to fly in each day an average of 270 tons; this enabled needs to be met to a greater extent than previously.

The January estimates were subsequently revised. The question then became whether it would be possible to fly in 300 tons a day during June, July and August, that is to say until the beginning of the main harvest season. This would have prevented a future deterioration.

This revision was due to two facts:

- a) the abundant cassava crop (manioc) south and south-west of Owerri in territory newly controlled by the Biafrans;
- b) the favourable corn crop as a result of planned intensive cultivation.

Due to the shooting down of an ICRC aircraft on the night of 5 to 6 June, total June food consignments to Biafra by all relief organizations were reduced to about 1,500 tons in June, i.e. an average of 50 tons a day, as against the ICRC estimate of a 300-ton minimum daily requirement. July supplies were higher, but still only 100 tons a day, i.e. one-third of the estimated minimum.

The curb on relief flights to Biafra in June also caused some disruption of the distribution system and control, and was a setback to the whole programme (composition of food—proteins—carbohydrates; closing of several distribution centres; reduction of personnel in some organizations)."

The following observations on the present situation have been made by the ICRC medical and food distribution staff in the field:

"At the beginning of June, the ICRC had a network of about 700 feeding centres which provided over a million children, pregnant women and nursing mothers with regular meals three times a week. Kwashiorkor had almost disappeared except in some territories recently occupied by the Biafrans. However, children and adults previously exposed to malnutrition had not fully recovered.

When flights were stopped, food stocks held at ICRC stores in Biafra would have allowed for continued operation on a normal

scale for only ten days. Immediate steps were taken to reserve stocks for child malnutrition treatment centres and hospitals. Refugee camps being no longer supplied, the number of children receiving ICRC relief was consequently reduced. At the beginning of July less than 10% of those normally receiving the benefit of ICRC relief action were receiving a little food, mainly of local origin.

The effect of the food shortage was worse than expected, especially on children who had already suffered from starvation, and in the southern provinces where more than 60% of the children were affected. Child malnutrition treatment centres were again overwhelmed.

According to ICRC statistics, the mid-July death rate of children in 40 ICRC centres was 50 a day, and the figure rose to 100 the following week.

The situation grows worse daily. If statistics from the other centres, the villages and refugee camps were included, these figures would be multiplied many times over.

Total relief supplies now reaching Biafra are only one-third of what, in May, was considered the absolute minimum to avoid a catastrophe. This is in spite of the fact that food is still flown into Biafra by other organizations."

Emergency Flight.—The emergency flight to Biafra for which the ICRC had requested authorization, took place on the night of 4 to 5 August 1969.

The ICRC planes took off from Cotonou on 5 August and flew direct to Uli on the usual route for ICRC mercy flights.

Their cargo consisted of thirty tons of medical supplies (including blood serum and plasma) for Biafran children. ICRC delegates, some of them doctors, were also aboard.

It was still dark when the aircraft took off for the return via Lagos, where they landed at about 7 a.m., before completing the last stage back to their base at Cotonou.

Success of the vaccination campaign in Biafra—The emergency air operation carried out by the ICRC during the night of 4 to 5 August to Biafra enabled the bringing of 100,000 anti-measles

vaccine doses, exclusively for children and 800,000 anti-smallpox vaccine doses able to be administered to children over 5 years old and adults.

Thanks to this consignment, the ICRC teams were able from 16 to 23 August to vaccinate 13,889 children against measles and 34,647 persons against smallpox. This medical vaccination campaign was effected at four points on Biafran territory: Owerri area, Ikwerre-Etche, near Port Harcourt, Etiti in the northern province of Okigwi and near Annang in Uyo Province in the South.

Since the beginning of the vaccination campaign, started at the end of 1968, 813,756 children have been immunized against measles and 2,068,184 children and adults have been injected with anti-smallpox serum.

Middle East

A family reunion operation took place at El Qantara on 28 July 1969 under ICRC auspices.

This enabled 130 Palestinians to return to Gaza territory and 48 Egyptians to go back to the United Arab Republic. Two Egyptian prisoners of war and one Israeli were also repatriated on that occasion.

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The Jerusalem and Amman delegations on 20 July 1969 organized a repatriation operation. Some handicapped Arab children, treated in hospital in Bethlehem were thus able to rejoin their families living in Amman since the June 1967 conflict.

After staying several months in Jordan, some children will be returning to West Bank territory to continue medical treatment.

People's Republic of South Yemen

Medical action.—Mr. A. Rochat, ICRC Delegate-General, visited the ICRC surgical team at Mukallah from 16 to 21 July 1969.

He was able to observe the efficient running of the hospital's operating service carried out by Dr. Gerber, surgeon assisted by Miss Péclat, anaesthetist, both of Swiss nationality.

The ICRC surgical team in Aden has also continued to provide surgical service to the Al Gamhouriah hospital. The team at present consists of two surgeons and a doctor-anaesthetist, Drs. Ivan Ivantchev, Tsanko Markov and Simeon Ivanov, all three placed at the ICRC's disposal by the Bulgarian Red Cross. Professor Francesco Castellano, Director of the united hospitals in Naples has also given his voluntary services to the ICRC for a period of two months.

Relief action.—There has been regular continuation of the relief action started in July for certain categories of persons in need in Aden. This action, consisting of the distribution of milk in three of the capital's centres, is carried out by the local Red Crescent, under the direction and supervision of the ICRC delegation. Relief has also been given to some 150 detainees' families.

Arab Republic of the Yemen

In Sanaa, the ICRC relief action on behalf of certain categories of women, children and the sick is being continued on the basis of the distribution programme drawn up in November 1968. This action includes the daily distribution of milk and cheese from which over 6,000 persons benefit at present. Distribution of these relief supplies is supervised by the ICRC delegate.

North Yemen

The ICRC medical team in Najran continues to give treatment to the local Yemeni population. The team deals with 100 to 150 cases daily at the polyclinic in its charge.

Laos

The Lao Red Cross, with the help of Dr. Baer, ICRC delegate, has carried out 9 relief distributions at Houeisai in Houakhong Province affecting nearly 2,300 displaced persons having taken refuge in 416 families.

The delegate also visited a village near Houeisai of war disabled in which there were 18 families.

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Dr. Baer paid a further visit in early August to prisoners held by Royalist forces and distributed some relief supplies to them.

North America

Miss A. Pfirter, head of the ICRC Medical Personnel Section, visited Canada where she represented the International Committee at the 14th Congress of the International Council of Nurses, held in Montreal from 22 to 28 July. She took that opportunity to make contact with the various services of the Ministry of Health in Ottawa, meet the Head Nurse of the Army Medical Service and acquaint herself with the various activities of the Canadian Red Cross.

In the USA she represented the ICRC at the General Assembly of WHO which took place in Boston from 8 to 25 July. She then went to Washington and New York where she visited the different services of the American Red Cross.

Hungary

A mission comprising Dr. F. Züst, doctor-delegate and Miss. L. Simonius, ICRC delegate, went from 3 to 8 August to Budapest to examine with representatives of the Hungarian Red Cross, 20 new cases of former deportees, victims of pseudo-medical experiments in concentration camps during the Second World War. Claims for compensation by these Hungarian victims will subsequently be submitted to a neutral Commission which the ICRC has charged with deciding on the validity of these claims and on the amount which the Government of the German Federal Republic has declared itself prepared to disburse to those entitled.