

Bulgaria

The VIth Congress of the Bulgarian Red Cross was held in Sofia from 11-13 November. Twelve hundred members of the Society took part in this Congress, the supreme body of the Bulgarian Red Cross which meets every four years. The International Red Cross was represented by Lady Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission, Mr. Henrik Beer, League Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Pictet, member and Director-General of the ICRC, and Mr. Herbert G. Beckh, ICRC delegate. National Societies of neighbouring countries had also been invited to delegate representatives.

Delegates of various sections of the Bulgarian National Society reported on their activities. These are considerable, particularly in public health education, first aid, mountain rescue work and life-saving.

We now give extracts of Mr. Pictet's address in which he drew attention to the excellent work carried out by the National Society in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Red Cross gives effective assistance within its own boundaries, as is its duty as a National Society. It also contributes, however, to alleviating suffering in less favoured countries stricken by conflict or natural disasters. For this it must be congratulated as a member, conscious of its responsibilities, of the community and the wide Red Cross world. Indeed, over the past few years the Bulgarian Red Cross has given exceptional support to the ICRC, without which it would not have been able to accomplish all the tasks imposed by the events. My presence here is therefore above all a testimony of deep gratitude.

I would in particular like to recall the admirable work undertaken during the last two years by the surgical team of the Bulgarian Red Cross, under ICRC auspices, in the Republic of South Yemen. Three of these are still working there at the present moment. Drs. Dobrev, Baer, Ivantchev, Markov and Ivanov have worked in particularly difficult conditions, with a competence and devotion beyond praise. They have deserved well of the Red Cross. I would like here to render the tribute to them which is their due.

Without the continuous support of the National Red Cross Societies, the International Red Cross could not continue its work. This is true for the ICRC and also applies to the League. It is thanks to this support and confidence that the ICRC is in a position to continue its traditional task in the world, as defined by the Geneva Conventions wherever man's folly has kindled the flames of war and trouble, that is, to protect victims, give information to anxious families and provide relief.

The Congress, at which delegates from all parts of the country were present, was the manifestation of the organization's strength and the enthusiasm of its members. Moreover, the Summary Report recently submitted at Istanbul by the Bulgarian Red Cross contains interesting information on characteristic activities: the mountain rescue service which at present comprises 32 sections with over a thousand voluntary rescuers, the life-saving service with 1,200 life-savers, the blood transfusion service (more than 300,000 offer their blood each year), the medical posts which give first aid to over 500,000 agricultural workers in the co-operative farms and the first-aid posts (320) sited on roads in case of accidents.

It should be added that the International Red Cross institution representatives appreciated the warm welcome given them by the Bulgarian Red Cross. In fact, excursions were arranged for them on a number of occasions. They visited one village in particular where they were able to see the extent of the work being carried out for the population.

Whilst in the Bulgarian capital, Mr. Pictet and Mr. Beckh were received by General Ivan Mikhaylov, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, Mr. Ivan Popov, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Cyril Ignatov, Minister of Health and President of the Bulgarian Red Cross, and Mr. Gospodinov, the Society's First Vice-President. Mr. Pictet also had discussions with the professors of the Sofia University Law Faculty.