

DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

On 26 August 1970 the International Committee addressed to National Societies a letter drawing attention to the importance of constantly expanding the dissemination of knowledge concerning the Geneva Conventions¹. Subsequently, in January of the present year, the International Committee reverted to the matter in a further letter, which contained a summary of the replies received from various National Societies.

It may, we believe, be of interest to our readers to take note of the two communications. Next month, we shall publish the text of a more recent letter which the ICRC has just sent to National Societies concerning a specific aspect of the dissemination of the Conventions, namely, the teaching of international humanitarian law in universities (Ed.).

Geneva, 26 August 1970.

The last two International Conferences of the Red Cross passed resolutions underlining the need to step up the dissemination of knowledge on the Geneva Conventions and they invited all National Societies actively to co-operate. Many have in fact taken action to that effect, either alone or in co-operation with their governments.

The ICRC appreciates their efforts. As it was responsible in 1970 for World Red Cross Day, it supplied you with copious documentary material in this field, since the chosen theme, "Protect Man; Thwart War", was directly inspired by the spirit and the letter of the Conventions.

¹ See *International Review of the Red Cross*, April 1968.

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At a meeting at the headquarters of the League of Red Cross Societies at Geneva in June 1970 the Heads of Information Services of 22 National Societies discussed dissemination of knowledge on the Geneva Conventions and on the Red Cross principles, and they recommended the organizing of a worldwide campaign. That recommendation is fully in keeping with the International Committee's own concern and it corresponds to the needs of the hour, for in the face of increasing violence, it is important to make extra effort to disseminate in all circles, particularly among youth, these fundamental data.

Anxious to comply with the foregoing recommendations, the ICRC today wishes to remind National Societies of the information material it can make available to them in support of their campaigns to disseminate knowledge of the Geneva Conventions.

AVAILABLE MATERIAL

I. For schools

a) *Primary*.—The school textbook *The Red Cross and My Country* and the corresponding *Teacher's Manual* are available in English and French versions for Africa and for Asia. In addition, the Manual has been translated into eleven other languages, including Chinese, Sinhalese and Korean. A new version, in Spanish, mainly for Latin America, is also now available.

A translation into Arabic is being prepared.

b) *Secondary*.—There are two books which are suited to secondary school.

One, the 14-page booklet *The Geneva Conventions*, is a summary for the armed forces and the public; it is available in French, English, Spanish, German and Arabic. The other is an illustrated booklet, *The Geneva Conventions*, prepared jointly by the ICRC and the League; it may be obtained in French, English or Spanish (66 pages).

c) *University*.—The *Course of Five Lessons on the Geneva Conventions* by Henri Coursier (102 pages), available in French, English, Spanish and German.

II. For the Army

a) *Officers*.—The summary mentioned above (b), and also the *Course of Five Lessons on the Geneva Conventions* ((c) above).

b) *Other ranks*.—Our *Soldier's Manual* is available in French, English, Spanish and Arabic.

We would also remind you that for the 8 May 1970 celebration we prepared a new series of 20 colour slides illustrating the main rules of the "Conventions". These are particularly well suited to teaching in schools or in the armed forces.

We hope that this reminder of the documentary material will be useful to you and will enable you, if you have not already done so, to undertake a campaign in your country to make the Conventions widely known and, if need be, to have them translated into national languages.

NATIONAL SOCIETY EXPERIENCE

Together with these suggestions, we would submit a request. We should be interested to know what experience National Societies have acquired in this particular field. We therefore venture to submit the following questions:

- 1) What action has been undertaken or is planned by your Society for the dissemination in your country of knowledge on the Geneva Conventions, independently of what the government is doing?
- 2) What suggestions can you make for the organization of a world-wide campaign as recommended by the Heads of National Society Information Services?

It is indeed our desire to take into account as much as possible the wishes of National Societies and to benefit from their advice and experience.

We intend publishing a report on the replies we receive to the foregoing questions, in order that the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Lion and Sun throughout the world may perceive more clearly the possibilities of disseminating knowledge on the Con-

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ventions and the experience of other National Societies which may serve as an example.

By endeavouring to spread the ideal of humanity and conciliation which is the basis of the Geneva Conventions, the Red Cross is acting in conformity with its mission of peace.

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Geneva, January 1971.

To our circular of 26th August 1970 concerning the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and Red Cross principles, we have received interesting and detailed replies to our three questions on:

- action already undertaken by National Societies;
- their projects in this field;
- their suggestions.

Our thanks go to the 26 Societies which have so far thus contributed, and at this stage we think it would be useful if we conveyed to all National Societies the gist of the information sent in. For that purpose, we enclose herewith a summary of each reply received.

It will be noticed, from a perusal thereof, that the work of diffusion has been centred mainly on reaching:

- various sections of National Societies;
- armed forces;
- civil defence organizations;
- medical and nursing associations;
- youth in general;
- schools, particularly at the secondary level;
- universities;
- the population as a whole through mass media.

The result of this campaign is already discernible, in that many requests and orders for documentary material are reaching us not only from National Societies but also direct from some army staffs which wish to have large stocks of the summary of the

Conventions and of the "Soldier's Manual". The printing of the Manual has now been completed in the four languages already mentioned.

We would remind you that both this manual and the school textbook "The Red Cross and My Country" may be reproduced as published or with any adaptation deemed necessary. We earnestly request that whenever these manuals are used in this way acknowledgement be given to the ICRC and the dummy be submitted to us before printing. On the other hand, no copyright will be claimed.

We would also like to draw your attention to some of our ideas on certain of the suggestions sent in.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Inducing governments to take action

We share the opinion of those National Societies which would like to see governments take more effective action to disseminate the Geneva Conventions. A reminder of this requirement is contained in the resolutions of international conferences of the Red Cross at which States parties to the Geneva Conventions were represented.

In this respect the very pressing memorandum sent by the ICRC on 21 November 1966 to all States parties to the Geneva Conventions will be remembered. That document was based on Resolution XXI of the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross. Unfortunately it did not produce any general response from governments; only a few of them took any positive action in the manner desired.

Again, on 15 June 1970, the International Committee sent the Latin American States a memorandum requesting their support in the work of dissemination which, in agreement with the National Societies of those countries, we are about to undertake, notably by introducing our school textbook and the "Soldier's Manual". We have already observed very favourable reactions and hope for some tangible results.

Participants in the meeting of Heads of National Societies' Information Services in June 1970, thought it was no longer

possible to rely only on the goodwill of governments, but that National Societies had to assume responsibility in that field. National Societies, therefore, should take initiative appropriate to national needs, not omitting, of course, to take every opportunity of reminding the authorities in their countries of their treaty obligations. We must not overlook the fact that lobbying the authorities is precisely one of the tasks incumbent on the leaders of National Red Cross Societies.

More and more the tendency is for National Societies to take the initiative in this field themselves; this was confirmed by the adoption of an interesting resolution by the 9th Inter-American Red Cross Conference in Managua.¹

2. Joint action at the regional level

This suggestion dovetails in with one of the recommendations made at the meeting of Heads of Information and we do think that advantage should be taken of the links between two or more countries, especially of linguistic and cultural ties, in order to draw up joint programmes for publications, radio and TV broadcasts and films.

3. Development of press and information services

Competent and well equipped information services are, indeed, essential to Red Cross development. They ensure constant liaison with the press, radio and television organizations which consult them on any events in which the Red Cross intervenes. They not only inform; they may correct wrong information published in the press.

One of the first steps to the organization of an Information Service is the appointment of an official for the communication to provincial or district sections of National Society news, for the forwarding to them of circulars of general interest issued by the League or the ICRC, and various reviews published by the Red Cross. It sometimes happens that circulation of news to provincial sections is neglected.

¹ See *International Review*, February 1971.

Incidentally, the League and the ICRC favour periodical meetings, on a regional or worldwide scale, of officials responsible for these services. A recommendation to that effect was expressed, moreover, by the Heads of Information meeting in Geneva in June 1970. The advantages to be derived from such meetings for the co-ordination of information and the development of the Red Cross movement in the world can hardly be over-estimated.

4. Dynamic and imaginative use of mass media

The ICRC should take advantage of every possibility in this field. We believe, however, that that suggestion may also be put into effect by National Societies, for it is they who are best placed to intervene in their own countries. In addition, they, better than anyone, know not only what to say to the population, but also how to say it. They can more easily find the appropriate words, the comparisons, the concrete examples and the striking pictures likely to influence the circles for which they are intended.

We know that many National Societies are already using their country's mass media. We, for our part, shall endeavour to support them whenever this is desirable. Furthermore, this year we shall try to give new suggestions to National Societies.

To conclude this first report we would invite once again those National Societies which have not yet responded to do so in the next few weeks, for with the escalating violence in the world it is more than necessary for National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies to constantly reaffirm in each country the basic and permanent principles of our movement.

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ANNEX

Review of replies received from National Societies to our circular of 26 August 1970

(in chronological order, to the end of January 1971)

1. Italy:

— ordered documentary material with a view to stepping up diffusion.

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Projects :

- distribution in schools of a manual containing the Conventions and the humanitarian principles;
- distribution of similar manuals during Red Cross Week;
- distribution of 1971 calendars containing news of international Red Cross activities.

Suggestions :

- that ICRC exert the necessary pressure on States signatory to the Conventions and on National Societies for the respect of the Conventions.

2. Australia:

Activities :

- has adapted “ The Red Cross and My Country ” for Papua/New Guinea;
- has supplied the armed forces with documentary material;
- makes available to the armed forces instructors to give lectures on the Geneva Conventions.

Projects :

- preparation, in co-operation with the Army, of a film on the Conventions;
- conferences in schools by “ commissioners ”, illustrated by films.

Suggestions :

- urge Governments parties to the Conventions to do more for their dissemination.

3. France:

Activities :

- organises conferences for the armed forces;
- introduction into secondary schools, through the Ministry of Education, of a course on the Conventions as an optional subject;
- supplies documentary material to teachers, the Institut Pédagogique and to nursing colleges;
- organises courses on the Geneva Conventions for first-aiders;
- many publications on the Conventions, including an offprint of “ Vie et Bonté ”;
- theses on the Red Cross and the Conventions in university faculties;

- has sent us a list of the publications, in French, on the Red Cross and the Conventions, available to the public.

Suggestions :

- suggests bringing the value of the Conventions up to date;
- would be interested in receiving “ The Red Cross and My Country ”.

4. Portugal:

- ordered the documentary material mentioned in our circular.

5. South Africa :

Activities :

- has launched an intensive campaign in high schools;
- has published for that purpose, in both official languages, an illustrated pamphlet, in simple language, on the history and essential provisions of the Conventions;
- has sent this pamphlet, with the agreement of the authorities, to all secondary schools, requesting the principals to use them in history or social science courses.

6. Peru:

- request for documentary material.

7. Austria:

Activities :

a) by adults :

- lectures on the Conventions in the Red Cross Training Courses;
- space and time given to the Conventions in the press and on television on World Red Cross Day;
- lessons in schools.

b) by the Junior Red Cross :

- distribution in schools of a booklet on the Conventions;
- sales of 6,000 booklets on the Conventions and distribution to secondary schools;
- conferences and films for the “ Civil Servants’ Day ”;
- introduction of a course on the Conventions in all final year classes;
- dissemination among the armed forces on the basis of the booklet for youth.

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Suggestions :

- the ICRC should produce a more topical film.

8. India:

Activities :

- wide publicity to the 8 May theme in 1970;
- special efforts to reach youth;
- intense dissemination with participation by 500 branches;
- many articles in the Red Cross reviews and the press in all the country's languages;
- lectures and courses to army officers and the police;
- the ICRC's " Course of Five Lessons " was distributed to Red Cross branches and to the Ministries of Health and Education; the latter forwarded it to all State Governments and the universities so they may examine the possibility of including the study of the Conventions in the primary and secondary schools and university programmes. Some universities have already included the study of the Conventions in their curricula;
- the Government, through the Society's efforts, has taken the following steps:
- publication and wide circulation of the Conventions and related documents, as well as of a pamphlet entitled " Notes on the Geneva Conventions 1949 ";
- publication by the army of a summary of the Conventions for defence personnel;
- a similar summary has been published and pasted in the pay book of all armed forces personnel;
- instruction in the defence services, nursing colleges and for chaplains etc.;
- special instruction for Indian contingents of the U.N. armed forces;
- the Third Convention is the subject of special study by the Army Medical Corps;
- the Fourth Convention will be taught to the Indian Administrative Service Personnel and Indian Police Probationers.

Suggestions :

- joint action by Red Cross and Governments in a world-wide dissemination campaign.

9. Netherlands:

- request for documentary material.

Activities :

- detailed enumeration of its information material;
- an illustrated booklet entitled “ The Geneva Conventions ” (78 pages) distributed to all public services, Red Cross branches, libraries, universities and to various other persons;
- a 24-page booklet on the principles of international humanitarian law (based on Pictet): distributed to 1000 recipients including Ministries, Senators, Members of Parliament, political parties, newspapers, radio, television, schools, libraries, trade unions, associations, churches, etc.;
- a booklet for the general public on the Conventions and the Red Cross movement (43 pages);
- an illustrated 50-page booklet “ At Home in the Red Cross ”, especially for members and first-aiders;
- a booklet “ Origin and Development of the Red Cross in general and of the Netherlands Red Cross in particular ”—under revision; large numbers being printed in three languages;
- a manual for teachers of hygiene: a compendium of four publications on the Geneva Conventions;
- a booklet on the Conventions published jointly with the Ministries of Social Affairs and of Health (widely circulated);
- school books and programmes drawn up in co-operation with the Utrecht University Institute of Pedagogy;
- numerous activities by the Press and Information Service.

Projects :

- several study projects for the army, secondary schools, volunteer workers and the Civil Defence.

Suggestions : Intensification of dissemination:

- by adapting efforts to places and customs;
- by encouraging countries with geographic, linguistic, cultural, social or other ties, to co-operate in joint action;
- by developing information services.

10. Chile:*Activities :*

- compulsory course on the Conventions for members of the Red Cross;
- courses in military institutes and to the medical professions.

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Suggestions :

- ask Governments to support a world-wide campaign to reach both State services and private firms.

11. Philippines:

- request for documentary material.

Activities :

- lectures on the Conventions in the Red Cross training courses;
- time given to important provisions of the Conventions in the weekly Red Cross radio programme;
- periodical articles in the main newspaper;
- action in service schools, officer cadet schools and the military academy;
- has proposed course in universities to the Government.

Suggestions : recommends to the ICRC

- a world-wide campaign;
- help to the poorer Societies with the provision of information material;
- to take the initiative to promote the Red Cross through the imaginative use of mass media.

12. Switzerland:

- desires to organise dissemination in schools (secondary);

13. Sweden:

- ordered documentary material;

14. Uruguay:

- ordered documentary material;

15. Indonesia:

- ordered documentary material;

16. Ireland:

- ordered documentary material;

Activities :

- dissemination in post primary schools of a summary of the Conventions.

17. New Zealand:

- ordered documentary material;

Activities :

- has distributed the new series of colour slides throughout all sections;
- action to reach the armed forces;
- dissemination by press and radio.

18. Denmark:

Activities :

- production of a series of 29 cartoon strips with 144 pictures (plus text) and the history of the Red Cross and the Conventions;
- these pictures will be reproduced in a magazine for children of and over 12 years of age;
- they will be published in various Danish newspapers to reach adults;
- offers to make them available to other National Societies;
- issue for universities of three publications on the Conventions.

19. Japan:

- ordered documentary material;

Activities :

- organised an inter-Asiatic Junior Red Cross seminar;
- approach to schoolmasters (see article in International Review of the Red Cross, December 1961);

Project :

- intends promoting study of the Geneva Conventions in earnest in the next school year.

20. Greece

Activities :

- following conversations with the ICRC, the latter provided this National Society with documentary material enabling it to publish a manual on the Conventions (10,000 copies) for youth;
- publication in the Junior Red Cross journal (circulation 285,000, published ten months of the year) of the history of the Red Cross in the form of cartoon strips.

21. Norway:

Activities: Instruction given:

- to the armed forces medical corps recruits;
- pupils of the Norwegian schools of nursing, the material being provided by the Norwegian Red Cross;
- courses on the Conventions included in primary school curricula;
- courses given by the Red Cross to Junior Red Cross; members of the Juniors have been invited to reply to the question "What do you know about the Red Cross?" by 8 May 1971.

Projects:

- in view of the shortcomings in the public's knowledge of the Conventions, the Society has decided upon a campaign in 1971.

22. United Kingdom:

Activities:

- 8,000 copies of the Summary of the Conventions sold to members;
- courses for adults and young people at the National Training Centre include the study of the Conventions;
- the Conventions feature in the introductory course given to new Red Cross members;
- distinguished speakers from time to time give lectures to selected audiences.

23. Finland:

Activities:

- the study of the humanitarian principles of the Conventions is included in elementary and secondary school curricula;
- training courses given by the Society include lectures on the principles and the Conventions;
- the nurses attending these courses and who will be responsible for giving instruction on public health in public establishments and schools receive documentary material on the Conventions, including "Rights and Duties of Nurses under the Geneva Conventions", edited in 1960 by the ICRC and the League;
- lectures to the armed forces and nursing schools;
- articles and features on the Conventions in the Society's journal which is distributed to all members, the authorities, many organizations, commercial undertakings and the press.

24. Pakistan:

- asked for documentary material;

Activities:

- dissemination programme in schools by the Junior Red Cross and its advisers;
- organization of annual public activities to make known the humanitarian principles and the Conventions;
- has published a 25-page booklet which is widely distributed to the public and in schools.

25. Canada:*Activities:*

- has adapted and reproduced in the Society's journal the ICRC's "Course of Five Lessons". This has been widely distributed particularly among government officials, the army, universities, the medical and nursing professions and the Junior Red Cross;
- publishes articles in the medical association journal;
- sends a considerable amount of special news features to university libraries (18), nursing schools (168) and secondary schools (6);
- branches have many colour slides and a large amount of documentary material intended for the Junior Red Cross;
- lessons on the Conventions are included in the instruction given to the Junior Red Cross;
- has encouraged the study of the Conventions in universities. 17 law faculties mention the Geneva Conventions in their courses on international law. 40 law school libraries have received documentary material, including 4 copies each of the "Course of Five Lessons";
- maintains close relations with the army for the introduction of courses to officers and troops.

26. Guatemala:

- has asked for documentary material;

Activities:

- encourages teaching to officers and troops;
 - provides the Ministry of Defence with the documentary material for that purpose.
-