

Vice-President of the ICRC, spoke of the excellent relations which had always existed in the past between the ICRC and the AWR and traced the work carried out by the International Committee after the end of the First World War for refugees and stateless persons, and the relief operations undertaken by the League of Red Cross Societies to come to the aid of victims of disasters, conflicts and other events.

“ In the legal sphere ”, he said, “ the ICRC was not inactive. In the Second World War, it instituted a “ travel document ” which was a sort of passport for facilitating the repatriation or emigration of displaced persons and which had proved to be very useful. When, after four years of preparation, the plenipotentiaries of States met in 1949 to discuss the revision of the Geneva Conventions and to conclude for the protection of civilians a special new Convention which was eagerly awaited following the terrible suffering endured by so many civilians, the ICRC managed to obtain the introduction, in this Fourth Convention, of a number of fundamental provisions concerning refugees, whereby the latter were placed on the same footing as persons protected by the Law of Geneva.”

Mr. Pictet went on to say how much apprehension was being caused by the upsurge of violence, which rendered increasingly arduous any attempt to go to the assistance of victims. He concluded by declaring his belief in the rule of law, our surety for peace and justice.

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## CHILD WELFARE IN AFRICA

*In Nairobi a seminar was held last year on “ Planning and Co-ordination of Child Welfare Work ”. The results were published in International Child Welfare Review<sup>1</sup> together with a report highlighting some of the questions raised in papers submitted by the*

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*child welfare services of, inter alia, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mauritius, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Kenya. Our readers are aware of the importance of child welfare in Africa today and will no doubt be interested in the report which follows :*

*Brief historical survey.*—Child welfare services, like many other social welfare services, were started by voluntary organizations or small groups of dedicated individuals. *Mauritius* seems to have taken the lead in this with the establishment of the Maternity and Child Welfare Society as long ago as 1925. At the other end of the scale, *Malawi* seems to have come in as recently as 1959, with the starting of a branch of the Save the Children Fund (U.K.) by a group of expatriate women, catering mostly for Asian and coloured destitute children.

Over the years, Government support for, and involvement in, child welfare services has been on the increase. This is clearly evidenced by regular government subventions and by legislation (e.g. 1963—The Child and Young Persons Act was passed in *Kenya*; 1967—A Child Welfare Policy was adopted by the Government of *Tanzania*; 1967—The Save the Children Fund of *Malawi* became an autonomous body, with His Excellency the President as Patron; the proposed Children and Young Persons Bill in *Uganda*), and the participation of various Government Ministries (especially the Ministries of Education, Health, Home Affairs, Local Government, Community Development and Social Affairs).

*Principles and objectives.*—In practically all the Country Reports the following principles and objectives are expressed, in one form or another, that:

- a) First priority be given to child welfare services.
- b) Basic service to children should be through their families; separation of any child from his family, the basic unit of society, should be a last resort.
- c) There should be encouragement and support for all efforts aimed at stabilizing family life and improving the social and economic environment of the child.
- d) Service to children should be rendered within appropriate age limits.

- e) There is urgent need for properly planned vocational training and moral instruction.
- f) There should be more emphasis on *preventive* services in order to reduce the need for *curative* services.
- g) Proper co-ordination and supervision of all child welfare services is required.

*Present institutions and services for children.*—These include the following:

Juvenile remand homes, approved schools, children's homes, primary schools, day care centres, adoption and foster care services, services for mentally and physically disabled children, nutritional services, pre-school feeding programmes and school feeding programmes.

*Co-ordination.*—Regarding co-ordination, there exists a very close working relationship between Governments and voluntary organizations in the field of social welfare, and particularly child welfare services. In some of the countries, children's departments have been established within Government ministries. In those countries where National Councils of Social Service have already been established, positive progress is being made in the right direction, thus minimizing duplication of services and at the same time ensuring maximum use of the available resources. More time and proper planning are still required, however, in order to bring about the desired co-ordination between all agencies involved in the provision of child welfare services.

*Problems at present.*—These are many and varied. However, the main ones, as mentioned in the Country Reports, are as follows:

- a) Lack of well-trained local personnel.
- b) Geographical distribution of available services for children.
- c) Financial constraints.
- d) Abandoned babies and homeless children, especially in towns and cities.
- e) Family breakdown.
- f) Poverty and ignorance resulting in malnutrition and neglect of children.

- g) Inadequate health services for mothers and children especially in rural areas.
- h) The handicapped children.
- i) Lack of mass education for all children of school-going age.
- j) Children being left for too long in some institutions for various reasons, e.g. because families are unable to care for them, but are unwilling to agree to foster care.
- k) Lack of proper co-ordination, in some cases, in the field of child welfare services.

*Research.*—Hitherto, research and survey exercises have been carried out, usually on an individual basis, without proper co-ordination. There is, therefore, a great and urgent need for a well planned and co-ordinated national social research and survey, to ascertain what services are already in existence and which special sections require priority. National universities are seen as a great asset in the creation of a permanent research unit where the work of a researcher and practitioner can be related and results evaluated.

*Training.*—Social welfare work, as a profession, is relatively new in this part of Africa. The social welfare personnel in the field, the majority of whom are of low and middle-level academic qualifications, do attend in-service courses, refresher courses and seminars that are organized from time to time. Appropriate subjects, including child welfare, are discussed. Professional training at a higher level—university diplomas and degrees—has in the past been done abroad, but positive steps are being taken to introduce this type of training in the national universities. Need is also expressed for a “ generic training ” in social welfare, including child welfare, in order to make social workers better equipped for the kind of environment they are going to work in.

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