

Relations between the National Societies and the ICRC

Comments by the ICRC

The ICRC should be in constant touch not only with the League, but also with the League members, the National Societies. It intends to strengthen these ties.

Although the ICRC works in close contact with governments, who wanted it to be uninationaI—a character which was approved by two International Red Cross Conferences—it has always considered that one of its basic tasks was to contribute, to the best of its ability, to uniting the Movement more closely and to strengthening the bonds among its members.

It was with this aim that, over the last few years, the ICRC opened several regional delegations which have enabled it to establish closer links with many National Societies. Other steps in the same direction were taken prior to the Tansley Report. These included the setting up in 1969, at the Geneva headquarters, of a Division to deal with problems relating to the dissemination of knowledge of the Geneva Conventions in collaboration with National Societies and, in 1973, of the National Societies and Principles Division. Mention should also be made of the seminar organized in 1963 on the work of the Red Cross, particularly of the National Societies, for victims of armed conflicts.

It seems necessary for the ICRC to continue its efforts in this direction and, as the Tansley Report suggests, to work closely with the League to promote a clearer understanding by all members of our Movement of the primary objectives of the Red Cross.

In its own sphere of activities (protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts; preparation for such operations; dissemination of knowledge of and development of international humanitarian law), the ICRC should continue to act as the co-ordinator and prime mover of the

Red Cross. It is, however, essential that it should continue to seek ways and means for the League of National Societies to help it in these same activities.

1. Public relations and contacts with the leaders of National Societies

Anxious to pursue the policy of closer human relations initiated by its past Presidents and to increase the exchange of views on the main problems now confronting the Red Cross Movement, the ICRC intends to make use of every opportunity for meetings between its members and the leaders of National Societies.

2. Information

Nobody disputes the need for the ICRC to explain more clearly what it does and why it does it—as was mentioned several times in the Tansley Report. The efforts of the ICRC Press and Information Division to make the style of its publications more direct should be combined with improved oral communications during the sessions organized by the ICRC at Geneva for those taking part in meetings of National Societies.

The National Societies should have the opportunity of discussing more thoroughly the questions of particular concern to them and of making known to the ICRC their views on such questions.

In this respect, it is desirable that National Societies should take part not only in the preparation of certain publications, but also in their printing and distribution.

3. Co-operation in thought and deed

1. Protection and assistance

The foregoing observations concerning the need for National Societies to participate in certain of the tasks related to the protection of victims of conflicts presuppose rapid and systematic communication to Societies in countries directly concerned of information about measures taken by

the ICRC, and periodic reports for circulation to other, in particular donor, Societies.

It is also important that Societies directly concerned provide the ICRC with all information and recommendations relevant to the tasks to be undertaken and to the means required.

2. Dissemination of knowledge of the principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions

The ICRC strongly encourages the implementation of the recommendations of the Tansley Report aimed at increasing National Society participation in propagating the principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions, notably in co-operating with their own governments, and by appointing someone within the Society to keep constantly well informed of protection activities in their broadest sense, as described by the Tansley Report.

3. Studies and special assignments

As it has constantly done in its work to promote the development of international humanitarian law, the ICRC is ready to call upon experts in National Societies to study particular problems relating to other aspects of assistance to victims of conflicts and, if need be, to appoint advisory committees.

In addition, it would be pleased to entrust certain matters of a legal or doctrinal nature to specialists who would be made available by National Societies.

4. Contribution to general information and to the training of National Society personnel

Within the scope of the technical assistance provided by the ICRC and the League for the development of newly formed National Societies, the ICRC is ready, in co-operation with the League, to contribute to the training of personnel of these Societies, particularly in the following ways:

- (a) general information for senior executives of National Societies with special emphasis on:

- the structure of the International Red Cross;
- the special role of the ICRC and the Central Tracing Agency;
- the tasks that could fall to National Societies in the event of conflict.

(b) training of personnel of National Societies to equip them with a thorough knowledge of “protection” in its broadest sense; dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law; tracing service; etc.

This training could be by seminars or courses held regionally or Geneva, and by temporary attachments at ICRC headquarters of staff from National Societies.

5. Analysis of National Societies

Generally speaking, the ICRC endorses the Tansley Report’s analysis of the institutional characteristics of a strong and active Society. But it should be clearly understood that such an examination is not intended to establish a comparative evaluation of the different Societies. Such a comparison, in view of their widely varying environments and conditions, would be impossible. Its aim is, rather, to supply useful information on those areas where their development efforts should be concentrated. Moreover, although many Societies do not measure up in every respect to the ideal described by the Tansley Report, it must be borne in mind that over one third of them came into being relatively recently and therefore have not yet reached their full capacity.

Some of the positive characteristics cited by the Tansley Report are especially important for preparing for the tasks incumbent on National Societies in the event of internal or international conflict. It stressed the need for a clear understanding, on the part of all members of the Society, of the principles of the Red Cross, for recruitment of members and leaders from a broad base, representative of the various elements of the population and, above all, for a proper balance in the implementation of the complementary principles of the auxiliary yet autonomous nature of the Society. The Report has admirably illustrated the practical implications of these two principles and the ICRC can only express its wholehearted support for the recommendations it makes on these fundamental issues.