

MISSIONS BY THE PRESIDENT

From September to November 1992 ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga went on several missions, visiting successively the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the United Kingdom, Tunisia and the United States.

Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (7-19 September 1992)

From 7 to 19 September 1992 Mr. Sommaruga made an official visit to China and to the two Koreas. This was the first time that an ICRC President visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In each of these countries the President was received by the highest State officials. In China he met the Prime Minister, Mr. Li Peng, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Liu Huagin, and the First Vice-Minister of Justice, Mr. Lu Jian. In the Republic of Korea he met the country's President, Mr. Roh Tae-Woo, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Unification, Mr. Choi Houngh Chol, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lee Sang Ock, and the President of the National Assembly, Mr. Park Jyun Kyh. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Mr. Sommaruga was received by President Kim Il Sung and had talks with the Deputy Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kim Yong Nam, and the Minister in charge of Legislation, Mr. Sin Hyong Il.

Throughout the talks Mr. Sommaruga insisted on the collective responsibility of States with regard to the application of international humanitarian law, on the need to respect the Red Cross emblem and the importance for the countries concerned to support their respective National Red Cross Societies. He also described the nature and scope of the ICRC's mandate and gave a broad outline of the institution's operational activities throughout the world.

His hosts, for their part, paid tribute to the ICRC's humanitarian activities and confirmed their support for dissemination activities and for the development of their National Societies.

Mr. Sommaruga also addressed a number of more specific issues, such as the problem of separated families and the humanitarian repercussions of that situation, which is still a considerable obstacle in the negotiations between the two Koreas. In that context, Mr. Sommaruga informed the leaders of the two countries of the ICRC's willingness to offer its services as a neutral intermediary and work to resolve the serious problems of a humanitarian nature that have subsisted for decades.

During his stay on the Korean peninsula, the ICRC President went twice to Panmunjom to visit members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland), who spoke to him about their activities and the future of their mission.

While in China, Mr. Sommaruga informed the First Vice-Minister of Justice, the Vice-Minister of Public Security and their close associates of the ICRC's readiness to carry out detention activities if *ad hoc* agreements were concluded beforehand. He also met General Yu Yongbo, Deputy Director of the Armed Forces' Political Department, with whom he discussed the importance of dissemination among the armed forces and the partial or total prohibition of certain weapons. The same questions were raised during a meeting in North Korea with General Kwon Jung Yong, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

Other topics discussed in North Korea were the ratification of Protocol II and the declaration recognizing the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission under Article 90 of Protocol I. The latter issue was also raised in talks with the competent officials in South Korea.

In the course of his visit Mr. Sommaruga met high-ranking officials of the three National Societies, with whom he discussed the Movement, relations between the ICRC and the respective National Societies, respect for the emblem, and independence of National Societies. He also visited a number of centres set up or run by the Societies concerned.

In South Korea Mr. Sommaruga received the Great Order of Mugungwa, the highest distinction awarded by the country's National Society, and an honorary doctorate in law from the National University of Seoul.

The mass media in the Republic of Korea showed great interest in President Sommaruga's visit and reported in particular the ICRC's

readiness to act as a neutral intermediary between the two Koreas in settling the question of divided families.

In China, Mr. Sommaruga gave a talk at the Beijing Institute of Diplomacy to about 150 students, professors and experts in international public law on the relevance of international humanitarian law in today's world.

In Pyongyang he gave an interview to State television and a lecture on current problems relating to international humanitarian law and the difficulties encountered by the ICRC in its humanitarian work.

On this visit Mr. Sommaruga was accompanied by Mr. Urs Boegli, Deputy Delegate General for Asia, and by Mr. Christophe Swinarski and Mr. Denis Allistone, regional delegates based in Hong Kong.

Strasbourg (7 October)

On 7 October Mr. Sommaruga was in Strasbourg, where he had been invited to address the autumn plenary session of the Assembly of the Council of Europe. He was accompanied by Mr. Zidane Mériboute, deputy head of the International Organizations Division, Mr. Jean-Jacques Frésard, of the Department of Operations, Mr. Paul-Henri Morard, head of the Press Division, and Mr. Dominique Buff, assistant to the President.

This was the first time that the president of an international humanitarian organization had been invited, with all the honours shown to a head of State, to address a plenary session of the Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Assembly first heard a report on ICRC activities, presented by Swiss parliamentarian Michel Flückiger, Chairman of the Committee on Migrations, Refugees and Demography, and then the opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, presented by Mr. Amaral, a Portuguese parliamentarian, on questions dealing with humanitarian assistance. In his address, Mr. Sommaruga emphasized the many years of excellent cooperation between the Council of Europe and the ICRC, and mentioned numerous Council resolutions relating to the development of international humanitarian law and various recommendations on the activities of the ICRC.

Drawing the Assembly's attention to the scale of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to serious and repeated breaches of international humanitarian law by the parties involved, Mr. Sommaruga stressed the urgent need for the 174 States party to the Geneva

Conventions to respect and ensure respect for humanitarian law in all circumstances. He then spoke about the right of victims to humanitarian assistance, the need for a concerted humanitarian approach and the importance of excluding political considerations from humanitarian issues. Mr. Sommaruga also stressed the problem of financing ICRC operations and replied to a number of questions addressed to the ICRC.

On the whole, the parliamentarians showed support for the views expressed by the ICRC President and stressed the need for their respective governments to give more generous support, especially financial, to the ICRC. The Assembly adopted the report of the Committee on Migrations, Refugees and Demography, and a resolution in support of the ICRC.

While in Strasbourg, Mr. Sommaruga also had talks with the President of the Assembly, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, and gave a press conference.

London (8-9 October 1992)

On his visit to London on 8 and 9 October 1992, the ICRC President was accompanied by Mr. Harald Schmid de Grüneck, head of the Financing Division of the Communications and External Resources Department.

On arrival Mr. Sommaruga was greeted by Lady Limerick, President of the British Red Cross. During his visit, he reviewed various issues of common concern with high-ranking officials from a number of ministries.

With Mr. David Omond, Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence, Mr. Sommaruga discussed the possible ratification of the Protocols, the problem of new weapons technologies, and the introduction of courses on humanitarian law into teaching programmes given by the United Kingdom to the armed forces abroad, and in Africa in particular.

A lengthy working meeting was held with high-ranking officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Overseas Development Agency and the British Red Cross. During the meeting, which was chaired by Baroness Chalker, Minister for Overseas Development, the discussion ranged from the ICRC's policy for the recruitment of field personnel, National Society activities as part of ICRC operations, relations with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Cres-

cent Societies, strengthening of National Societies in developing countries, multilateral dialogue with States party to the Geneva Conventions, and financing of the ICRC.

Mr. Sommaruga's talks with Mr. Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, and Mr. Russell Johnstone, Deputy Chairman of the Liberal Group at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, centred on the situation in the former Yugoslavia, and in particular on the policy of "ethnic cleansing", the problem of detainees and the recent agreement on their release and possible transfer.

At the headquarters of the British Red Cross, the ICRC President took part in a working meeting chaired by Lady Limerick and attended by a number of National Society officials. During the meeting the question of financial support for the ICRC by the British Red Cross was discussed, as were ratification of the Protocols by the British government, the plan to hold an international meeting in 1993 on respect for international humanitarian law, the October 1993 meeting of the Council of Delegates in Birmingham, and problems relating to the use of the emblem.

Tunisia (30 October - 3 November)

The ICRC President was in Tunisia from 30 October to 3 November 1992. During his visit he was received by the country's President, Mr. Ben Ali, by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, the Minister of National Defence, Mr. Abdel Aziz Ben Dhia, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Sadok Chaabane, and the Minister of Public Health, Mr. Dali Al-Jezi. He also had talks with leaders of the Tunisian Red Crescent and with the Minister of Public Health officially inaugurated the exhibition "Humanity in the midst of war".

In his talks with the Head of State, Mr. Sommaruga reiterated the ICRC's readiness to visit all persons detained in Tunisia. On this point, Mr. Ben Ali suggested that the ICRC study the possibility of contributing to the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. Mr. Sommaruga also expressed the hope that the Tunisian government would recognize the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission.

These two issues were also discussed with the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs.

The Minister of Defence, for his part, accepted the ICRC's offer to give courses on international humanitarian law as part of the

training of officers in Tunisia and elsewhere in North Africa. Seminars are being planned for 1993.

In his talks with the various officials Mr. Sommaruga reviewed the ICRC's activities worldwide and in Tunisia in particular, called for greater compliance with humanitarian law and raised the question of ICRC financing. He also expressed the hope that the governing bodies of the Tunisian Red Crescent would work on strengthening the National Society's operational capacity.

In the course of his visit, Mr. Sommaruga gave a talk entitled "Respect for international humanitarian law: a constant challenge" at the *Ecole nationale d'administration* in Tunis. He also met the President of the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Vice-President of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, and Ambassador Rashid Driss, President of the High Committee for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Lastly, in Tunis Mr. Sommaruga attended the opening ceremony of the African preparatory meeting for the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, where he met several ministers and high-ranking officials, including Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, OAU Secretary-General. Mr. Sommaruga concluded his mission by giving a press conference, which was attended by about 30 journalists from Tunisia and abroad.

New York (8-11 November)

On 10 November the ICRC President was invited to take part in a round table on humanitarian matters, organized as part of the work of the Third Commission of the United Nations General Assembly. The other participants were Mrs. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Jan Eliasson, United Nations Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Erich Kussbach, President of the International Fact-Finding Commission.

Mr. Eliasson spoke about humanitarian intervention and the delicate balance that had to be struck between solidarity with victims and respect for national sovereignty. Speaking about the situation in the former Yugoslavia, Mrs. Ogata stated that an international presence was the best possible form of protection.

Referring to recent conflicts, Mr. Sommaruga deplored the fact that despite numerous representations, appeals and statements, serious breaches of international humanitarian law were occurring daily. He felt that it was urgent for the international community to participate

actively in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. One of the proposals put forward in this connection, namely that Switzerland should convene an *ad hoc* conference, was currently being studied. The President also stressed the importance of impartial humanitarian assistance in increasingly politicized contexts. He expressed satisfaction at the adoption of Security Council resolution 780, which provides for a commission of enquiry to be set up to investigate grave violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia, and said that he hoped that this would be a decisive step towards generalized repression of serious breaches.

The discussion that followed centred on the militarization of humanitarian assistance and the principle of armed intervention in cases where the belligerents' attitude endangers the population of entire countries. The participants agreed that there were no hard and fast rules in that respect and that solutions had to be found on a case-by-case basis. In the course of the discussion, Mr. Sommaruga replied to many questions put to him by the delegates attending the work of the Third Commission.

The four participants in the round table gave a press conference, summing up the main points of their discussion for the numerous journalists present.

Mr. Sommaruga also met the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, with whom he discussed non-compliance with humanitarian law in current conflicts, the difficulties facing United Nations operations, the problem of mines, and the means of protecting relief workers and humanitarian aid.

During his visit Mr. Sommaruga met members of the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group, which brings together ambassadors of major donor countries, and of the United Nations Security Council. In his discussions he informed them about the difficulties encountered by the ICRC in discharging its mandate, and sought greater support for the institution's activities. The ICRC President was also the guest of the United Nations television programme "World Chronicle".

Throughout his meetings with diplomats and representatives of the media, Mr. Sommaruga stressed the ICRC's current areas of priority, namely its protection and assistance activities in Somalia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He also pointed out that the military dimension of relief operations in those two cases could be no more than an exceptional and temporary measure, that it was dangerous for humanitarian operations to take on political overtones, and that humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political efforts in seeking solutions to current crises.