

Regional seminar for the French-speaking countries of Africa on national measures to implement international humanitarian law

(Yaoundé, Cameroon, 23-27 November 1992)

A regional seminar for the French-speaking countries of Africa on national measures to implement international humanitarian law (IHL) was held in Yaoundé from 23 to 27 November 1992.

The seminar, which was held under the auspices of the Cameroonian Government, was organized by the ICRC and the Henry Dunant Institute (HDI) in conjunction with the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC).

This meeting was the sixth in a series of seminars held by the HDI in Yaoundé between 1977 and 1986 and then interrupted for several years. It was now decided to resume the series of seminars, with emphasis placed on national measures to implement international humanitarian law. The meeting is also part of a series of regional seminars organized by the ICRC on this subject. Two seminars preceded it: the first was held in Sofia, Bulgaria (20-22 September 1990) and the second in San José, Costa Rica (18-21 June 1991).

The Cameroonian authorities were represented at the opening session by Mr. Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Joseph Owona, Secretary-General at the Presidency, Mr. Peter Agbor-Tabi, Chancellor of the University, and Mr. Abdoulaye Babalé, Minister for Higher Education. The ICRC delegation was headed by Mr. Bruno Zimmermann, Deputy Head of the Legal Division, Mr. Edmond Corthésy, Deputy Delegate-General for Africa, Ms. María Teresa Dutli, member of the Legal Division, Mr. Ulrich Bédert and Mr. Jean-François Olivier, regional delegates, and Mr. Denis Noël, legal delegate for Africa. The Henry Dunant Institute and the IRIC were represented respectively by Mr. Jiri Toman, Deputy Director, and Mr. Dieudonné Oyono, Director of Studies.

The purpose of the seminar was to enable experts in humanitarian law from French-speaking countries in Africa to enter into a dialogue on national measures to implement IHL and to extend this exchange of

views to include new specialists. Particular attention was given to making all the participants aware of the importance of adopting such measures in peacetime in the various countries concerned.

Forty-three participants — senior officials of the Ministries of Justice, Defence and Foreign Affairs and representatives from academic circles — from sixteen countries of French-speaking Africa took part in the seminar. They were selected on the basis of the future role they would play with a view to having these national measures adopted in their respective countries.

The seminar was spread out over five days and divided into three parts: introduction to the main subjects of IHL; the international implementation of IHL; and its national implementation.

Most of the introductory lectures on the various subjects were given by academics from several African countries, by two experts who are members of the International Fact-Finding Commission, Ms. Ghalib Djilali (Algeria) and Mr. André Andries (Belgium) and by delegates from the ICRC, the HDI and the IRIC.

The discussions on the chosen themes alerted the participants to the need to enact or adapt national legislation in the various countries, to take diverse other measures to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to initiate dialogue about past experiences and current projects.

There were in-depth discussions on the repression of grave breaches of international humanitarian law, national mechanisms to apply it, and the International Fact-Finding Commission. A consensus emerged on the need to take all these measures to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

At the end of the seminar, the participants adopted a report and recommendations in which they undertook to ensure that the relevant legal details and rules of application concerning IHL were forwarded to the ICRC, to promote ratification of Protocols I and II and recognition of the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission and to step up their efforts in dissemination. To this end, participants were invited to stress, in their mission reports, the obligations incumbent on States and to publicize the subject of the seminar and the concerns expressed there.

This third regional seminar on national measures to implement IHL was broadly successful and its objectives were attained. This was mainly due to the high standard of the speakers and the participants, who are well placed to follow up the issue within their own countries. In addition, the discussions clearly demonstrated the indisputable need

for action at the national level to have these measures adopted, and the participants' determination to see that such action was taken.

It was therefore recommended that further seminars be organized in French-speaking and English-speaking Africa to create an awareness of the importance of adopting legal and practical measures in advance, in peacetime, to ensure that IHL is put into effect.

J.M.

The Arab Republic of Egypt ratifies the Protocols

On 9 October 1992 the Arab Republic of Egypt ratified the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 relating to the protection of victims of international (Protocol I) and non-international (Protocol II) armed conflicts, adopted in Geneva on 8 June 1977.

The instrument of ratification was accompanied by a declaration and a notification, the texts of which (original: Arabic) are given below:

DECLARATION

The Arab Republic of Egypt, in ratifying Protocols I and II of 1977 additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, wishes to express its conviction that the provisions of Additional Protocols I and II represent the minimum level of legal and actual protection that must be afforded to persons and civilian and cultural objects in armed conflict.

On the basis of its strong conviction of the principles of the great Islamic Sharia, the Arab Republic of Egypt wishes at the same time to emphasize that it is the duty of all nations alike to refrain from the involvement of innocent civilians in armed conflict; furthermore they should make all efforts, to the maximum extent possible, to that end as this is indispensable for the survival of humanity and the cultural heritage and civilization of all countries and nations.