

ICRC President in Belgium

Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the ICRC, Mr. Michel Convers, head of the ICRC's Operational Support Department and Mr. Andreas Lendorff, head of its General Relief Division, were in Brussels from 8 to 11 February to take part in celebrations to mark the 125th anniversary of the Belgian Red Cross and to meet representatives of the Belgian Government and the European Community.

The National Society's 125th anniversary ceremony took place on 9 February in the presence of Their Majesties the King and Queen of the Belgians, members of the Government and the diplomatic corps, representatives of other National Societies and 2,000 Belgian Red Cross volunteers. Speeches were made by H.R.H. Prince Albert of Belgium, who is President of the National Society, Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, Mr. Mario Villarroel Lander, President of the League, and the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister.

The ICRC representatives were also received by Mr. Leo Tindemans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for talks on the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions and the Belgian contribution to the ICRC budget. They also reviewed the ICRC's activities around the world.

During a visit to the Commission of the European Communities the ICRC delegates met Mr. Abel Juan Matutes, Commissioner for Mediterranean Policy and North-South Relations. Mr. Sommaruga explained the specific nature of the ICRC's mandate and gave a detailed description of its operations worldwide. He thanked Mr. Matutes for the Community's support and Mr. Matutes reaffirmed that support.

Mr. Sommaruga also visited Mr. Frans Andriessen, Commission Vice-President for External Relations and Trade Policy, and Mr. Martin Bangemann, Commission Vice-President for the Internal Market. He once again described the ICRC's current activities and together they discussed more specific topics such as the ICRC's special role under the Fourth Geneva Convention and its procedures for visiting places of detention.

The three ICRC representatives then met several of the people within the Commission with whom the ICRC has regular contacts.

Finally, Mr. Sommaruga had a working lunch with the Permanent Representatives of the European Community. The Secretary-General of the Commission of the European Communities was also present.

The mission ended on 11 February in Flanders, where the Flemish-speaking community of the Belgian Red Cross had organized a ceremony attended by leaders of the "community" and local authorities at the home of the painter Rik Bourguignon in Diegem. Mr. Bourguignon gave Mr. Sommaruga two of his seascapes as a gift to mark the ICRC's 125th anniversary.

