

ICRC ACTIVITY IN THE NEAR EAST IN 1970

Some figures

In 1970, the ICRC, through its delegates in Israel and the occupied territories as well as those in Arab countries, continued its activities consistent with the Geneva Conventions. Their tasks consisted essentially in visiting civilian and military prisoners, in delivering family messages, in organizing the re-uniting of members of families that had been separated and in tracing missing persons.

Visits to civilian and military prisoners

In 1970, some 3,500 civilian Arab detainees from the occupied territories and Arab States were visited fortnightly by ICRC delegates in various prisons in Israel. During these visits, parcels were distributed by the ICRC to detainees who had not received any assistance from their kin, and visits by relatives were made easier for them by the organization of transport facilities to various places of detention.

The ICRC also deals with the situation of prisoners of war, who are visited regularly, in Israel and the occupied territories as well as in Arab countries.

Thus, delegates visited on numerous occasions the 72 U.A.R. prisoners, captured between 1969 and December 1970. These prisoners received from their families, through the ICRC, some 800 parcels and over 1,300 messages, while they themselves sent about 1,600 messages.

As for the 39 Syrian prisoners taken in May, June and September 1970, they were also seen at least once a month by the delegates, who handed over to them over 200 parcels and 650 messages sent by their families. In addition, some 700 letters written by prisoners were passed on to their relatives.

Twelve visits were made to the 10 Lebanese prisoners of war, all of whom were captured in January 1970. Nearly 60 parcels

and about 350 letters were handed over to them, while they sent nearly 500 messages to their families.

Finally, one Jordanian prisoner, taken in July last, was visited from time to time by delegates.

All prisoners received ICRC relief in the form of books, records, cigarettes, food and games.

In the Arab countries, the total number of detainees consists of 15 Israeli prisoners of war and one Israeli civilian.

Twelve Israeli prisoners of war captured between December 1969 and July 1970 are held in the United Arab Republic. Two are at present in a Cairo hospital. These prisoners were visited on an average once a month; they sent 200 messages to their families and received about 200 parcels and 500 letters.

In Syria, three prisoners of war, taken in the spring of 1970, and the civilian detainee, taken prisoner in the night of 31 December 1969 to 1 January 1970, were visited several times by ICRC delegates. They wrote 56 messages and received 90 parcels and over 300 letters from their families.

Family messages

Since the June 1967 war, nearly two million family messages have been sent through the ICRC across the lines in both directions.

In 1970, nearly 76,000 letters were sent from Arab countries to the occupied territories (40,000 from the U.A.R., 9,000 from Syria, 15,000 from Jordan and 10,000 from other Arab countries); 115,000 messages were carried in the opposite direction, thus bringing the total for 1970 to nearly 200,000 letters.

Re-uniting of families

The ICRC is carrying out operations for bringing together members of families in territories occupied by Israel and in Arab countries. In 1970, about a thousand persons were enabled to be re-united with their kin.

521 persons went from the United Arab Republic, Syria and Jordan to join their families in the occupied territories, and 546 crossed over to the United Arab Republic from Gaza and Sinai.

Tracing missing persons

One of the important tasks of the ICRC in the Middle East is the tracing of missing civilians and soldiers.

Last year, the ICRC delegations in Israel and the occupied territories, Syria and the United Arab Republic received over 5,600 requests for news; this figure does not include those enquiries, running into tens of thousands, arising out of the civil war in Jordan.

“ The Red Cross and My Country ” in Asia

On several occasions, *International Review* has mentioned the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross to disseminate knowledge of the principles of the Geneva Conventions in schools, through the publication of a textbook “ The Red Cross and My Country ” with its complement the “ Teacher’s Manual ”¹. It is highly desirable that these booklets, edited and illustrated by the ICRC, should be made known and disseminated as widely as possible.

Mr. J.-M. Laverrière, who had already made a first tour of Asian countries for this purpose, went for a second time on a trip that lasted from 9 August to 30 November 1970, in the course of which he visited the ministries concerned and the National Societies of Burma, Ceylon, the Republic of Korea, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

In each country, the responsible government officials expressed to the ICRC delegate their interest in this scheme and their acceptance to introduce the textbook in their primary schools, while the National Societies, on their part, fully conscious of the importance of this action, promised their co-operation. In several places,

¹ See *International Review*, March and December 1969, July 1970.