

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Seven ships carry 50,000 tons of relief supplies

The European Economic Community, in its desire to participate in international efforts to bring aid to Pakistan refugees in India, last summer donated, through the ICRC, 43,000 tons of rice and 7000 tons of other cereals, to the value of 48 million Swiss francs.

These figures are very large, but to realize what they represent, one need only imagine that to send it all by air would have required 4000 Boeing 707 jets.

The goods donated by the EEC were shipped by the ICRC to India by sea. As Calcutta harbour cannot take deep-draught vessels, seven medium-tonnage cargo-ships had to be chartered.

Here is an impression of the loading at the end of October of the *Aristoteles*, flying the Greek flag, in the north Italian port of Savona.

The sun struggles to show its pale face through the autumnal mists that drift over the town; the keen wind has a sharp edge to it, and winter really seems to have set in. On the quayside, dockers in thick woollen jerseys rub their hands together in an effort to keep warm as they wait for the lorries loaded with 25-kilo bags of rice to arrive one after the other direct from the province of Vercelli, the centre of the Italian rice-growing area, some 120 km to the north of Savona.

They start to unload the lorries and deftly pile some twenty bags (about half a ton) in the sling which the crane hooks up and hoists in a rattle of chains. It swings round ninety degrees and the bags dangle over the deck.¹ In the meantime, a second sling is got ready, the crane works without interruption, and lowers down its load with astonishing accuracy.

¹ *Plate.*

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We go on board the ship. There, the spectacle is even more impressive. The hatches of five holds are all removed, and twenty feet below deck, other dockers are busy unloading and placing the sacks along the sides of the holds. They are neatly piled on top of each other, close together along the whole floor-surface, with, here and there, an air chimney to allow the free circulation of air. In the huge gaping holds of the Aristoteles, the sling with its bags appears tiny as it is lowered down by the crane. But the vessel, after all, is over 400 feet long and nearly 60 feet wide.

In a few days, loading operations will be over, and the ship with its cargo of 7000 tons, or 280,000 bags, of rice will depart from Savona for India, touching only at Cape Town. At Calcutta, unloading will be supervised by the Indian Red Cross, and the rice will then be carried to the refugee camps.

As we watch the bags rising on top of each other in the holds of the Aristoteles, we remain pensive at the thought of what this gift will soon represent over there, far away; the rice, distributed to thousands of refugees, will be for them more than precious food, it will also mean new hope and life.

In addition to this generous gift from the European Economic Community, the ICRC is also at present engaged in sending to the Indian Red Cross:

100 tons of unskimmed powdered milk (value Sw. F. 500,000.—),
a gift from the Swiss Government, and

10 tons approx. of medicaments (value Sw. Fr. 140,000.—),
a gift from the ICRC.

All those relief supplies (rice, cereals, powdered milk, medicaments) are being dispatched to the Indian Red Cross, which, in co-operation with Indian Government bodies, is setting up plans for their distribution to refugee camps.



October 1971: European Economic Community donation of rice arriving at Savona, Italy...

Photos J.-J. Kurz / IC

...and alongside...





...for loading aboard one of the vessels chartered by the ICRC for shipment to Calcutta from where it will be sent for distribution to Pakistani refugees.

