

In his reply President Chissano pointed out the importance of the ICRC's impartiality in its work on behalf of victims of conflicts. He also emphasized the excellent co-operation that existed between the ICRC and the Mozambique Red Cross Society.

ICRC President in the Middle East

ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga, accompanied by Mr. Angelo Gnaedinger, the Delegate General for the Middle East, was in the Middle East from 3 to 7 September 1990 for high-level talks with the Jordanian, Iraqi and Iranian authorities concerning the Gulf crisis. To quote President Sommaruga, the purpose of this mission was to achieve a "comprehensive humanitarian mobilization". The mission itself was in keeping with the ICRC's mandate to act in the event of international armed conflict on the basis of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the institution's statutory right of initiative. It had four main objectives:

- to provide protection and assistance, in both Iraq and Kuwait, to the various categories of civilians affected by the events;
- to improve co-ordination and step up the ICRC's operation in Jordan in behalf of foreigners transiting through the country;
- to examine possibilities of assisting foreign nationals crossing other borders (particularly into Iran);
- to review the current situation with regard to the repatriation of Iraqi and Iranian prisoners of war.

In Baghdad, President Sommaruga had three meetings with the Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Tariq Aziz, during which they discussed the terms of a possible agreement defining the ICRC's operating procedures.

However, the ICRC did not succeed in obtaining the Iraqi Government's authorization to launch an operation in Iraq and Kuwait for the victims of the crisis.

It had requested permission to visit foreign civilians who had the financial means to leave Kuwait or Iraq but who had not been authorized to do so, and to help them stay in touch with their families by means of Red Cross messages. As for foreign nationals — especially

Asians — authorized to return to their home countries but who did not have the means to do so, the ICRC had offered to provide them with any emergency assistance they needed and to facilitate their departure by issuing them with travel documents, since they had no contacts with their embassies.

The ICRC had moreover proposed its services as a neutral intermediary in arranging the shipment of food and essential medical supplies to particularly vulnerable groups of civilians in both Iraq and Kuwait.

The ICRC is therefore unable at present to discharge its humanitarian mandate in either Iraq or Kuwait, but it remains determined to find appropriate solutions. President Sommaruga reiterated the appeal he had launched on 2 August 1990 for all the parties involved and all the States party to the Geneva Conventions to respect the rules of international humanitarian law. Following his discussions in Baghdad the ICRC President expressed deep regret that the negotiations with the Iraqi authorities had not led to the signature of an agreement providing for a comprehensive humanitarian operation.

The ICRC President also spent two days in Tehran, where he met the Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Hassan Habibi, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati. Satisfaction was expressed on both sides at the repatriation of the prisoners of war from the Iran/Iraq conflict. The talks then focused on the problems caused by tens of thousands of foreigners arriving in the Shatt-el-Arab border area from Kuwait and Iraq. The Iranian Government had requested the ICRC's help in the matter and consultations began in Tehran to work out the details of a joint effort to assist these people.

President Sommaruga spent the last day of his mission in Jordan, where in King Hussein's absence he had talks with Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal. Their discussions centred on the tragic plight of the hundreds of thousands of people transiting through Jordan, to whom the ICRC is providing emergency relief in co-operation with the Jordanian Red Crescent.

In Amman the ICRC President also met the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.
