

RED CROSS AT INTERNATIONAL WELFARE CONFERENCE

A meeting of the League of Red Cross Societies, a member agency of the International Council on Social Welfare, was held for world-wide Red Cross participants in the ICSW's XIVth Conference conducted in Helsinki, Finland, 19-24 August, 1968.

The meeting at the Finnish Red Cross Headquarters was jointly conducted by General Martola, President of the Finnish Red Cross, and Miss Monique Esnard, the League's official representative to the conference, which discussed aspects of " Social Welfare and Human Rights ".

The Red Cross participants were told of programmes of the host Society and visited its Blood Centre, a hospital for plastic surgery, and other installations.

Mr. Frederic Siordet, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, addressed the meeting on " Protection of the human being in armed conflicts ", his conclusions being:

The study of the history of the Red Cross and of the humanitarian Conventions postulates two observations.

First: that the Red Cross was born in 1863 and was carried on with remarkable momentum, was due to the favourable moral " climate " of the time. Under the influence of philosophical and religious movements, people were more responsive than formerly to the suffering of others and to human solidarity.

Secondly, in the sphere of Red Cross work action precedes law. Powers are ever more sensitive about their national sovereignty, and even more so in time of war than in time of peace. They never agree to limitations, being placed unconditionally on that sovereignty. They only consent in as much as experience has proved it does them no harm. The first Geneva Convention of 1864 might never have seen the light of day but for the events of Solferino. All extensions of this Convention and its successors, as well as their improvements, have merely sanctioned, by providing future legal bases, earlier achievements due, for the most part, to action taken by the ICRC or some Protecting Powers.

If we are to bring to a halt civilization's mad race to apparent self-destruction, if we are to struggle against the spirit of war and,

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in the event of war, if we are to contend with it to save its victims, that favourable "climate" must be restored. What is needed is that all men of good will, and those of the Red Cross to begin with, persist in continuing the work of mercy, in other words to proclaim, illustrate and finally impose on the world what has saved millions of human beings and can yet save millions more, namely "the moral value of human life".

Miss Esnard reported on social welfare congresses in which the League participated, either through its secretariat or the National Society of the host country, and on the IVth Red Cross International Seminar on Welfare Service, held in Rosenön, Sweden in the Spring of 1967. We would also mention that the League was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the International Council on Social Welfare.

THE HOSPITAL SHIP "HELGOLAND"

It is known that a hospital ship has been sent to Vietnamese waters by the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany. When giving an account in Bonn at the beginning of October of two years' activity, Dr. A. Schlögel, Secretary-General of that National Society, stated that the action in progress has entirely fulfilled its initiators' hopes and is expected to continue throughout 1969.

In two years, 18,910 sick have been given treatment. During the same period, 3210 sick were installed in the ship, whilst 15,700 were cared for at aid posts set up by the "Helgoland".

At Da Nang (where the vessel sailed after being initially at Saigon), the number of war-wounded civilians has considerably increased. Most of the sick are children up to the age of 15 who at certain times represent more than 40% of the non-ambulatory patients.
