

MEETING OF EXPERT GROUP ON NAPALM AND OTHER INCENDIARY WEAPONS

In resolution 2852 (XXVI), adopted at its twenty-sixth session, the General Assembly of the United Nations requested the Secretary-General to prepare as soon as possible, with the help of governmental qualified consultant experts, a report on napalm and other incendiary weapons and all aspects of their possible use. The objectives of the report were to provide information to peoples and governments on the effects of napalm and other incendiary weapons, and to promote within the United Nations or in other international forums debates and negotiations that might lead to a prohibition of such weapons.

The Secretary-General therefore convened an Expert Group which held three sessions: the first, from 15 to 19 May 1972, and the second from 24 July to 4 August 1972, at United Nations Headquarters in New York; the third, from 28 August to 1 September 1972, in the Palais des Nations, Geneva. Having been asked to delegate an observer, the ICRC was represented by Mr. G. Malinverni, of the Legal Division.

During its proceedings, the Expert Group drew up a report divided into four chapters.

In Chapter 1, the experts describe the principal incendiary agents and weapons that exist today. They point out that some of the weapons, although they are extremely simple and can be manufactured from cheap and readily available raw materials, have a considerably greater destructive effect than explosive weapons. Therein lies their main military attraction. This chapter classifies different incendiary weapons according to their use.

Chapter 2 deals with the action of incendiary weapons. It describes the damage they cause in built-up areas and in rural areas. Because of their high burning temperature, incendiary weapons may be effective even against poorly combustible mate-

rials. If the fire spreads, it is uncontrollable and may destroy anything that lies in its way. The chapter closes with the statement that even shelters are not always effective in ensuring protection against mass attack.

In Chapter 3, the experts describe the medical effects of incendiary weapons on individuals. There is an exceptionally high proportion of deaths among the casualties. Recovery is slow, and during most of the period the patient remains in great pain. Burns are likely to leave him deeply scarred and disfigured for the rest of his life. The report lays stress on the resulting psychological effects.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the different forms of incendiary warfare and stresses its social and economic consequences. When used in large quantities against urban areas, incendiary weapons have proved to be among the most powerful means of mass destruction known. Attempts have been made, so far in vain, to destroy crops, forests, and other features of the rural environment by means of incendiary weapons. Should the attempts eventually succeed, the consequences will undoubtedly be disastrous.

In their conclusions, the experts assert that there exists today a broad range of incendiary weapons capable of destroying everything over the large area that surrounds the point of impact, and that the risk of a massive spread of fire makes them largely indiscriminate in their effects. The same applies where densely populated built-up areas are in close proximity to military targets. The report also lays stress on the fact that incendiaries are particularly cruel in their effects and that much of the injury caused by them is likely to be superfluous. For these reasons, after referring to the principal provisions of existing international law on the subject, the consultant experts end their report by bringing to the attention of the General Assembly the necessity of working out measures for the prohibition of the use, production, development and stockpiling of napalm and other incendiary weapons.

The ICRC can only welcome the initiative taken by the United Nations in undertaking this study, one in a series of reports prepared by the Secretary-General on the subject of weapons. While it is

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a Red Cross tradition that it should concern itself with the plight of the victims of armed conflicts, it has been impelled to give its attention also to certain weapons, for it is impossible to ensure effective protection for the victims of armed conflicts without considering the growing threat, to civilians as well as combatants, of the development of modern weapons. In this context, pursuant to a proposal which the experts of nineteen governments put forward at the second session of the Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts, the ICRC has decided to call a special meeting, in 1973, to consult with legal, military and medical experts on the problem of such conventional weapons as may cause unnecessary suffering or be indiscriminate in their effect.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

Amnesty International held its fifth Council Meeting at Woudschoten (Zeist, near Utrecht) from 8 to 10 September 1972. The meeting was attended by 130 participants: members of the International Executive Committee and of the International Secretariat, and delegates of National Sections. Those invited to attend included observers from international governmental and non-governmental organizations: United Nations, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Council of Europe, Organization of African Unity, International Committee of the Red Cross and League of Red Cross Societies. The ICRC and the League were represented by Mme Danièle Bujard, ICRC Legal Adviser. This year, delegates of the National Sections of Australia, Bangladesh, India, Japan, New Zealand and Nigeria attended the Council Meeting for the first time.

The Council, which was presided over by Mr. Sean MacBride, Chairman of the International Executive Committee, studied questions relating to the Organization's statutes, administration, organization and fund-raising, and relations between the Inter-