

PREPARING FOR THE SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF GOVERNMENT EXPERTS

As already announced in *International Review*, the ICRC is organizing a second session of the Conference of Government Experts on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts for the spring of 1972, as it had not been found possible to deal fully with all the subjects at the first session and some topics had not even been broached. The experts had, therefore, unanimously recommended that the work begun at the last Conference should be pursued at a further meeting.

Accordingly, the President of the ICRC wrote on 27 September 1971 to all the Governments of the States expressly bound at that date by the Geneva Conventions of 1949, in order to send them the report on the work of the first session of the Conference of Government Experts, and to invite them to delegate experts to a second session to be held in Geneva, starting on 3 May 1972, for a period of approximately four weeks. Many experts having urged at the first session that it would be most advantageous if the Conference were to be extended to a large number of countries, the invitation was therefore not limited to those Governments which the ICRC had requested to send delegates to the first session, but extended to nearly one hundred and thirty Governments.

As is indicated in the letter of invitation mentioned above, the relevant departments of the International Committee are working on a series of draft protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which will consist of several articles, each one of which will be accompanied by a brief commentary. These protocols, together with the documentation prepared for the first session and the report on the latter's work, will constitute the nucleus of the documentation for the second session, and the ICRC hopes to have them in the hands of Governments in January 1972, so that the experts going to Geneva may have sufficient time to study them and be ready to discuss them.

The ICRC hopes that at the second session agreement will be reached on the wording of the various texts, so that discussions at a future Diplomatic Conference may thereby be facilitated. Nevertheless, the character of this second session will still be that of a meeting of experts: the views expressed will not be binding on their Governments. In the words of the President of the ICRC: "As at the first session, discussions will be limited to humanitarian questions; thus special situations, past or present, will be mentioned only for the purpose of improving future law, this being, moreover, in keeping with the character of meetings held under the auspices of the Red Cross".

A Tracing Service in Dacca

As we mentioned in a previous issue, General Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan, in an interview with Mr. V. Umbricht, member of the International Committee, on 26 July, gave his agreement to humanitarian action by the ICRC. The ICRC decided to send to East Pakistan Dr. Otto Lehner, Head of Delegation, and Mr. Nicolas Vecsey, Assistant Head of the Central Tracing Agency. They left Geneva on 19 August, their mission being particularly to organize, in co-operation with the Pakistan Red Cross, a service to trace the missing and to re-unite families.

Upon arrival in Dacca, the first objective was to make known as widely as possible in East Pakistan the setting up of the tracing service so that the population would know that it could turn to a central office to trace members of their families. Notice of the opening of the tracing service was published in the English, Bengali and Urdu newspapers at the beginning of September, but the ICRC delegation had before that had forms with the sign of the red cross printed and distributed through all post offices. The Pakistan Red Cross, for its part, delivered a number to each of its regional sections.

The tracing service itself, in the National Society's building in