

# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## **The International Committee's Action in the Middle East**

As indicated in our previous issue, the ICRC began to carry out its activities under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, through its delegations in the Arab countries and in Israel and Israel-occupied territories, as soon as the conflict broke out in the Middle East.

### **Application of the Geneva Conventions**

Since the outbreak of fighting, the ICRC expressed its concern about the situation of civilian victims and of prisoners of war. Already in October, it had addressed a number of appeals to the belligerents, reminding all the parties involved of their undertakings, vis-à-vis the international community, to implement the Geneva Conventions without any reservations, and calling upon the belligerents to place humanitarian principles above all other considerations and to put into practice and without delay the undertakings they have assumed for the respect and safeguard of the human person.

Despite those appeals, the ICRC has found that, since the cease-fire, the parties to the conflict have made the full or partial application of the Geneva Conventions conditional on terms of reciprocity or have stipulated that the fulfilment of their humanitarian duties be subordinated to political or military demands. The ICRC has stressed, in this connection, the following :

“The commitments arising out of the Geneva Conventions are of a binding and absolute nature. Under those commitments, each State unilaterally undertakes, vis-à-vis all other States, without any reciprocal return, to respect in all circumstances the rules and principles they have recognized as vital. These do not involve an interchange of benefits but constitute a fundamental charter that proclaims to the world the essential guarantees to which every human being is entitled.”

The ICRC has therefore called upon the belligerents to allow it to accomplish the tasks incumbent upon it under the Geneva Conventions.

Those tasks include, in particular, the repatriation of wounded prisoners of war; visits to all interned prisoners of war; the forwarding of lists of prisoners of war; and the protection of civilian populations in occupied territories.

### **Prisoners of war**

The Egyptian and Israeli authorities, following the agreement they reached on 14 November 1973, confirmed to the ICRC that the evacuation of the wounded from Suez and of wounded members of the Egyptian Third Army, as well as the repatriation of Egyptian and Israeli prisoners of war, could start under its auspices. On the same day, the Egyptian authorities handed the ICRC the list of Israeli prisoners of war held by them. The list was also transmitted to the Israeli authorities.

Several repatriation operations, that took place between 15 and 22 November 1973, enabled some 8,500 prisoners of war to return to their own country. They were repatriated by air, by means of four aircraft (one DC-6, two DC-8 and one DC-9) provided by the Swiss Government for the ICRC. Two doctors and four nurses, despatched by the ICRC, accompanied the wounded prisoners of war on the flights, in order to care for those whose condition necessitated attention during the journey.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, about 1,300 wounded civilians and soldiers were evacuated from Suez in ambulances and lorries, under ICRC auspices, with the co-operation of the United Nations Emergency

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<sup>1</sup> *Plate*

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Force. On 25 November, on the Qantara road, the ICRC handed over the bodies of 11 Israeli and 28 Egyptian soldiers.

Although the repatriation of Egyptian and Israeli prisoners of war held by Israel and Egypt respectively has been successfully completed, the ICRC, at the end of November, had still not received, despite repeated requests, any capture cards concerning Israeli prisoners of war in Syrian hands or been granted authorization to visit such prisoners.

### **Occupied territories**

The ICRC also concerned itself with the situation of Arab civilians in occupied territories, including Egyptian and Syrian territories occupied by Israeli since 1967 as well as that following the latest conflict. But, though ICRC delegates have been authorized, since 18 November, to go to newly-occupied territories belonging to the Arab Republic of Egypt, they have not been allowed so far to enter newly-occupied Syrian territory. On the other hand, the ICRC delegate for the northern sector has been able to go to the earlier-occupied Syrian territory of the Golan Heights and continue the work being carried out in that region since 1967.

### **Relief**

On 25 October, the ICRC organized a meeting to discuss relief action for the benefit of victims of the conflict, which was attended by over a score of National Societies. The ICRC gave an account of the work it has been carrying out in the Middle East for several years, described the plan of action it has put into operation immediately upon the outbreak of the October 1973 hostilities and put forward an assistance programme in which the whole Red Cross movement would take part, and which would be co-ordinated by the ICRC.

In October 1973, the ICRC launched a general appeal to Governments and National Societies for gifts either in cash or in kind. Sixteen National Societies responded to the appeal by despatching numerous consignments of medicaments and medical equipment, blankets and other relief supplies for the Arab Republic of Egypt (24 tons medicaments and 1,375 blankets), the Syrian Arab Republic (18 tons medicaments), Israel (6 tons medicaments and 1,375

## REPATRIATION OF WOUNDED PRISONERS OF WAR



At Tel Aviv, in the ICRC aircraft, wounded Egyptian prisoners of war waiting the take off for Cairo...

Photo J.-J. Kurz/ICRC



... while, in Cairo, wounded Israeli prisoners await for their departure for Tel Aviv.  
Photo Vaterlaus/ICRC

## SEARCH FOR THE DEAD



After the fighting in the Sinai, Egyptian and Israeli officers meet in the « no-man's-land » under ICRC auspices...

*Photo J.-J. Kurz/ICRC*



...to prepare operations for recovery of the dead in the terrain between the two armies.

Photo Vaterlaus/ICRC

We might add that five new National Societies were admitted as members of the federation — those of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Fiji, Mauritania and Singapore — thus bringing total League membership up to 120.

### COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

The Council, which is composed of representatives of the ICRC, the League and all recognized National Societies, met at Teheran on 7 November 1973, and elected Dr. Eric Martin, President of the ICRC, its Chairman.

It heard reports on the Empress Shoken Fund, the Augusta Fund and the Florence Nightingale Medal. The report of the Commission for the Financing of the ICRC was adopted, as was the resolution on racism and racial discrimination already submitted to the Board of Governors. The Council then turned to questions relating to the control of the Statutes of National Red Cross Societies and adopted a resolution submitted on that subject by the Standing Commission. Lastly, Mr. Pierre Boissier, a member of the ICRC, described the achievements of the Henry Dunant Institute, of which he is Director, in research, training and publications during the past four years.

### **Henry Dunant Medal**

Also at the meeting of the Council of Delegates, Lady Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross, presented *Dr. Pavle Gregorić* (Yugoslavia) and *Mr. John A. MacAulay* (Canada) with the Henry Dunant Medal, which is known to be the highest distinction of the Red Cross.

Dr. Gregorić, who was President of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia for twenty years before being appointed Honorary President for life, in 1967, actively contributed to the prevention of disease and to improved health conditions in his country. Mr. MacAulay was Chairman of the League of Red Cross Societies from 1959 to 1965.

## IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

He has rendered the Red Cross great services, both nationally and internationally, for he was President and is now Vice-President of the Canadian Red Cross.

### STANDING COMMISSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

The Standing Commission comprises nine members, namely, two representatives of the ICRC, two of the League and five elected members holding office until the close of the following International Conference of the Red Cross.

At Teheran, the XXIIInd Conference elected the following members to the Standing Commission : Mr. George Aitken (Canada), Mrs. Farid Issa-el-Khoury (Lebanon), Sir Geoffrey Newman-Morris (Australia), Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh (United Kingdom) and Dr. Nadejda Troyan (USSR).

At its first meeting on 15 November, the new Standing Commission elected Sir Geoffrey Newman-Morris and Mrs. Issa-el-Khoury as its Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. Mr. T. Sloper was requested to continue to act as technical adviser.

The Standing Commission was entrusted by the XXIIInd Conference with the duty of fixing the date and place of the XXIIIrd Conference on the basis of proposals made to it.

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