

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The International Committee in Cyprus

Following the approaches which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) made on 20 July to the parties to the conflict raging in Cyprus, constructive responses were received on 22 July.

In its message, the ICRC had offered the belligerents its services and stated that it relied on their full and strict application of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. It reminded them that the Conventions required them to observe at all times the distinction between combatants and civilians, to treat wounded, sick, prisoners of war and civilians humanely, and to respect medical establishments and units.

Relief

The parties to the conflict asked for ICRC help in providing relief to victims. A DC-9, lent to the ICRC by the Swiss Government, left Geneva on 22 July for Cyprus with fourteen delegates—three of them doctors—and 3½ tons of medicaments (blood plasma and other blood substitutes, antibiotics, surgical equipment, dressings, blood transfusion equipment) and blankets.¹

One of the delegates, Mr. H. de Senarclens describes the journey and the start of the ICRC's action:

The DC-9 chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross took off from Geneva Airport on 22 July 1974, and set a course for Malta, its first and only stop before its final destination: Cyprus.

¹ *Plate.*

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We were 14 delegates—including three doctors—aboard the aircraft, and in a few hours we were to begin our Red Cross mission in Cyprus : first of all, we were to establish two delegations, one in the Greek Cypriot zone, and the other in the Turkish Cypriot zone in order to give protection and assistance to those in need on both sides of the conflict.

During the refuelling stop in Malta, Pierre Gaillard, the head of the ICRC mission, held his first operational briefing with the whole team. We were informed that we will have to immediately survey needs, according to the up-to-date news received before our departure.

Landing in Nicosia being impossible, the DC-9 touched down towards the end of the afternoon, after a seven-hour flight, at the British military base of Akrotiri, in the south of the island. To reach Cyprus entailed a long detour along the coast of Libya and Egypt, to reduce flying in Cypriot air space to the minimum.

As soon as we landed, Pierre Gaillard and the doctors conferred with the chief surgeon of the base hospital, in order to gain an idea of immediate priorities. Then we went on to Limassol, the southernmost town of the island. When we arrived in the city it was already under curfew and we saw a few official cars on the road, their headlights extinguished because of the black-out.

In the office of the Cyprus Red Cross, converted into a hospital, lit only with oil lamps, we saw immediately that medicaments, especially blood plasma, were tragically short. We decided to draw on the three tons of medical supplies brought from Geneva, and to forward the remainder at dawn to Nicosia, where needs were even greater.

We left Limassol for Nicosia. The region appeared calm and we drove without incident. Here and there, bullet-riddled walls and burnt-out vehicles bore witness to recent bitter fighting. As we approached Nicosia, at the centre of a large plain, we saw a column of black smoke rising from a suburb.

Pierre Gaillard and several delegates went quickly to the hospital to contact the senior members of the Cyprus Red Cross. The hospital stands a few hundred yards from the " green line », the buffer-zone between the two communities.

Fighting had resumed nearby and the explosions were audible in the casualty-crowded hospital. We saw sick and wounded everywhere, and we were told operations had to be performed even in the corridors. One of my colleagues, a doctor, set to work to assess the situation so

that the necessary medical personnel and supplies could be provided with all speed.

In the meantime the ICRC aircraft had left Akrotiri for Beirut where the ICRC has a warehouse. On 23 July it came back to Akrotiri with nine tons of medicaments (mainly blood substitutes, antibiotics, oxygen cylinders, surgical equipment and dressings).

On 25 July another aircraft in the Middle East, a DC-6, was lent to the ICRC and it brought a further seven tons of emergency medical supplies to Akrotiri. On 26 and 27 July the same aircraft made two round trips Akrotiri-Beirut-Akrotiri, bringing 18 tons of medicaments, food, babyfood, sheets and blankets for the benefit of the conflict victims in Cyprus.

By 27 July more than 40 tons of relief supplies had been air-lifted by the ICRC, including also the gifts in kind from the League of Red Cross Societies and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the following countries: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Israel (Magen David Adom), Lebanon (Lebanese Red Cross Society and "Palestinian Red Crescent"), the Netherlands, Sweden and Yugoslavia. Further support has been received from UNICEF and UNRWA.

In Cyprus

By the end of July the ICRC was represented by delegates in the Greek and Turkish zones. Apart from assessing needs, the delegates immediately on arrival began the work of protecting and assisting conflict victims.

In Ankara

On 22 July a delegate left Geneva to represent the International Committee in Ankara, and three days later a doctor delegate followed him, for the purpose of visiting prisoners of war in Turkish hands.

The work of the Central Tracing Agency

More than 2,500 enquiries and requests to trace people in Cyprus have reached the International Committee's Central Tracing Agency in Geneva. An ICRC delegate specialized in the work of the Agency

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has, in co-operation with the Cyprus Red Cross, set up a tracing bureau in Nicosia. About a hundred replies have already been sent by radio to Geneva and will reassure enquirers about their friends and families stranded in Cyprus.

Another duty of the Central Tracing Agency under the 1949 Geneva Conventions is to obtain lists of prisoners of war and interned civilians from the detaining authorities and transmit them to the governments of the countries of which the prisoners and detainees are nationals. In addition, the Agency arranges mail facilities between captives and their families.

In view of the development of Agency activities following the events in Cyprus, a specialist from the Agency went to Ankara on 27 July as adviser to the Turkish Red Crescent in order to co-ordinate work with the Geneva headquarters.

Appeal to governments and National Societies

By 30 July the ICRC had in Cyprus 19 delegates—3 of them doctors—and in Turkey 4 delegates—one a doctor. The total cost of the operation amounted to about a million Swiss francs.

The cost of operations is estimated at more than four million Swiss francs. The ICRC has, therefore, urgent need of financial contributions. That is why it has appealed to governments and National Societies to cover the cost of these operations for the benefit of the civilian population, prisoners and internees, and of which the scale and need are described above.



In Geneva, 22 July 1974: emergency supplies being loaded aboard an ICRC aircraft for Cyprus.

Photos Vaterlaus/ICRC





At Dar es Salaam, June 1974: A member of the *FRELIMO* executive board hands over Maria Ligia to an ICRC delegate who will take her to her parents in Mozambique.