

# NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Formerly: International Bulletin of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1869

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## Belgium

*Jeunesse Servir*, the review of the Belgian Junior Red Cross, has devoted one of its issues to the *Geneva Conventions seen and lived by the young*.

This publication, which is very attractively illustrated, contains in particular several coloured reproductions of paintings and drawings by Belgian children for a competition in which more than 800 Belgian schools took part.

This most intelligent way of making children think about situations connected with the four Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 by illustrating them is a highly interesting contribution to the dissemination of the Conventions.

It is in fact essential that these are made known as much as possible to the general public and that the Red Cross endeavours to assist governments to fulfil the obligation which they have undertaken by the terms of an article common to the four Conventions to "undertake, in time of peace as in time of war, to disseminate the text . . . as widely as possible".

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## France

*The French Red Cross review Vie et Bonté devotes its April 1962 number to the new housing estates built generally speaking near large urban centres. Several studies bring out the important medico-social problems arising, in France as elsewhere, from the existence of these vast units. The following extracts show how much that National Society is concerned in such problems:*

"A soul must be given to each of these improvised towns", said Mr. François-Poncet, President of the French Red Cross, when he opened the Society's General Meeting on December 4, 1961.

These improvised towns are the new vast housing estates which are springing up today almost everywhere in France. Whilst they are the rational solution to the housing shortage in our country, they also impose, once they are set up, important problems to all who concern themselves directly or indirectly in human relationships and who wish for man's future happiness.

The French Red Cross has a great rôle to play in these large settlements. It must assist the authorities in accomplishing their projects on the moral, welfare and medical level. What are these projects ? What have they already achieved ? What are their future intentions in these fields ?

The purpose of the enquiry set on foot by *Vie et Bonté* is to reply to these questions by broadly describing these large estates at the present time and indicating the main lines for future tasks, especially as far as the French Red Cross is concerned.

All action undertaken to "humanize the large housing estates" in fact requires a number of technically qualified persons prepared to devote themselves without reserve for any task which they may have to face. Now such personnel can to a certain extent be supplied by the French Red Cross to the promoters of these new towns. Of this the public authorities are fully aware as can be seen by the Minister of Housing's circular of July 25, 1961 addressed to prefects and heads of Departments :

"The object of the present communication is to inform you now of the conditions in which the large welfare organizations, such as the Family Allowances offices or the French Red Cross, can help you to solve problems which are already being raised . . .

"The French Red Cross", the Minister continued, "does not wish, except in special circumstances, to invest capital in the construction of welfare centres, but it can provide the necessary administrative and specialized personnel for the running of certain services . . .

"It is therefore strongly to be recommended that contact be made with the Presidential Council of the Red Cross in the department concerned, once it has been decided to establish a welfare centre."

The third paragraph of this most striking circular deals entirely with "Training and encouraging first aid workers in the large

housing estates". It begins: "The Red Cross can ensure the training and encouragement of first-aid teams by organizing courses and exercises on the spot.

"It is highly desirable to see these teams developing in the new housing centres. Whilst they can undeniably render useful service to the inhabitants, they can also offer a range of particularly healthy and attractive activities to the young. It would therefore be most advisable to make premises available to these first-aid teams either in the youth hostels envisaged for these housing estates or in special buildings.

"The President of the Red Cross council in the Department should have this matter brought to his attention, so that the necessary premises can be allocated to the Red Cross and accommodation reserved eventually for the instructors of these teams, since it is highly desirable that they reside on the spot."

After stressing the importance of helping aged persons living in these large estates, the Minister of Housing returns to the Red Cross and defines its sphere of action in the new industrial areas. He states in particular that "if there are small and medium-sized firms in an industrial area it would serve a useful purpose to set up a common aid centre whose running could be entrusted to the Red Cross".

The Minister's appeal in fact launches the beginning of a great Red Cross action, to take part in humanizing the large housing estates.

How, moreover, could the Red Cross remain apart from any attempt being made to give a soul to these new towns? Does it not have as its motto, "to serve"? Without seeking to take the place of other social welfare organizations or to act as their rivals, it also has its rôle to play.

But what should this rôle be? Must it restrict itself to the initial Red Cross rôle, which is to care for the sick? Or should it rather adapt itself, extend its field of action and reorganize its activities to meet new needs? Several Committees have already unhesitatingly chosen the second alternative. Thus the dispensary at Villeneuve-la-Garenne (Seine) has become a medico-welfare centre with a children's nursery, library, handicraft workshops and domestic economy courses for the new inhabitants.

The Montluçon Committee has pitched its tent in the new district of Font-Bouillant and organized a treatment centre and a crèche.

Centres for home-care have been established in the new towns of Sarcelles, Strasburg, Mourenx and Nancy.

But this is not enough. Other projects are being studied. The Red Cross should move resolutely in this direction. It should take a part in examining particular needs and then adapt its activities accordingly.

But first and above all it should be present. The initial welcome is all-important. These families who have come from many different places, knowing no one, have need of a friendly hand helping them to integrate themselves in a community which is already in existence and break down this feeling of isolation which threatens to crush new arrivals.

Should there be any difficulty in organizing permanent reception centres, made known by posters or leaflets, in places near existing Committees ? The problem is certainly more complicated when the new buildings are far from any important Centre, but could this not be an additional reason to take action by installing a corresponding Red Cross Office or outstation ?

No time should be lost, the Red Cross should be there on the arrival of the first tenants. There would be a place for all its activities. There would first of all be the nurse. What a comfort it would be for the inhabitants to see her in the new town, to know that she would be ready to respond to their appeals, to be able to find her in the Treatment Centre. She would also welcome them at the Mother and Child Protection Centre with advice, invaluable for a youthful population, and who would supervise the nursery. There would then be Health Courses in the home for parents and children.

For youth, a present source of anxiety, could not the Red Cross offer it enrolment, which it instinctively seeks, either in first-aid teams or in such activities as courses in infant welfare, gymnastics, librarianship, handicraft work . . .

By instilling the Red Cross spirit into them would one not be helping them to find an ideal to live for ?