

## **The Lebanese Red Cross today**

After a period spent almost entirely in performing relief work, an activity which takes precedence over everything else during a civil war, the Lebanese Red Cross started, some three years ago, on a new phase of development, based on two main activities: stirring the population to awareness of the human problems peculiar to Lebanon, and secondly, teaching and training young people. At the same time, the Lebanese National Society naturally continued to carry out its medico-social activities, for the grave incidents which still take place in several parts of the country are but the natural consequences of the conflict which broke out in 1975 and which has not yet been brought to a conclusion.

The Red Cross branches in southern Lebanon have still to cope with a very unstable situation, in a climate of permanent insecurity and with sporadic outbreaks of fighting and border incidents occurring almost every day. Contact with the capital is very difficult and very often the only way to communicate is by sending special messengers by car, who have to brave the perils on the road.

In other parts of the country, clashes between armed bands are causing a whole series of ills: many persons wounded, villagers fleeing their homes, prisoners captured; all these people the Red Cross endeavours to succour.

But now that there have been fairly long periods of truce, and various plans and projects are well advanced, we would like to give here an account of what is being done.

## **The Red Cross Teaching Guide**

The *Teaching Guide*, elaborated by the ICRC and the League, is an educational instrument which meets present teaching standards and is intended to arouse the interest of youth in humanitarian problems and in the principles of the Red Cross.

In Lebanon, the work of printing and circulating the *Teaching Guide* and introducing it into the official school curriculum was carried out by the Junior Section of the Red Cross. It was first necessary to translate this voluminous publication and also to add to it a special chapter on the National Society. The commission that was then set up undertook a series of high-level discussions and contacts, with the purpose of settling the various stages for the execution of the programme.

The departments concerned at the Ministry of National Education having given their full support to the project, the immediate result was that the Pedagogical Research Centre printed two thousand copies of an Arabic version of the *Teaching Guide*, intended for secondary school teachers, and agreed to adapt its forthcoming school textbooks for all the schools in Lebanon, so as to introduce in them the Red Cross notions as recommended in the *Teaching Guide*.

The daily press, radio and television gave accounts of the development of the project at regular intervals. It is expected that lectures will be given shortly at the University of Lebanon and at the "Ecole normale" (Teachers' Training Institute) to help teachers get better acquainted with these texts.

The aim is to allow teachers, through the normal school curriculum, to inculcate in their pupils a good knowledge of the Red Cross: its goals, its activities and above all its humanitarian principles.

It is in this fashion that the young will be nurtured on these notions from a tender age, a process that should contribute to combat any tendencies they otherwise might have had for violence and fanaticism, and should develop their sentiment of human solidarity.

## **Community health**

A pilot-study on community health was developed by three qualified nurses in one of Lebanon's most underprivileged villages. The idea was to conduct a detailed survey among the villagers and from the results thus found set up a self-sufficient medical structure, based on the village's potential manpower, also taking into account its remoteness. It was planned that the financing and initial training of local personnel should be done by the official medical services of the region in co-operation with the Red Cross. The survey claimed more than a week of intensive work on the spot, under extremely difficult conditions, due to the village's remoteness and poverty. However, despite the urgent need for such a project, the implementation of the programme urged by its authors has not yet begun for various reasons, not the least important being the

political situation. The plans are ready and hopes are high that the project will be soon carried out.

### **Community development**

A second project is now in full expansion. This is a pilot community development project carried out in a Red Cross dispensary opened in one of the poorer districts of the capital. After having made a study of the situation and of the various factors connected with the general surroundings, the member of the Lebanese Red Cross Central Committee in charge of the project, with the help of a team of voluntary workers and of a social welfare officer, set up a veritable community development centre. Here, the inhabitants of the district can meet in congenial surroundings and find many outlets for their activities. A variety of courses are offered, such as literacy lessons, first aid, sewing and even a course on social psychology.

The centre almost immediately attracted the inhabitants, especially the women, whose social evolution is still somewhat lagging behind, and who can find here suitable opportunities for broadening their activities in various forms well adapted to their surroundings.

This centre of attraction for the whole of the district is an appropriate place for launching a number of campaigns (cleanliness, vaccination, etc.) in which the active involvement of the population can be very useful.

The range of activities has grown to such a degree that it is not only the adults who receive training. The smaller children and in particular those in infants classes have now been included in the project, for the organizers have found that if one wished to introduce fundamental improvements in the community at various levels, the education of the very young was an indispensable step, without which nothing of any substance could be constructed. The children's teachers, together with the social welfare officers and voluntary workers, have therefore arranged for a series of talks to be given to the children on such themes as love for their country, and respect for their surroundings, their family, their home and the human person.

The logical course would be to open more centres throughout the country. But every quarter in the towns, every region in a country which has such a large variety of communities, must form the object of a special study, and the practical application will be in every case of a new and specific character.

## **The struggle against drugs**

In its struggle against drugs, an evil which is causing today considerable problems among young people in Lebanon, the Red Cross has adopted a progressive method: surveys and studies, in co-operation with specialists; seminars to train social workers and various categories of educators and to familiarize them with preventive action; colour leaflets, showing strip cartoons, edited by the Junior Red Cross, widely distributed on university campuses and to many people interested in the scheme; compilation of a file on the role that could be played by young people in the prevention of drug addiction; publication of a special issue of the journal edited by the Pedagogical Research Centre on drugs and the drug problem.

Many people and all kinds of different bodies are taking part in this struggle: the association of doctors and pharmacists, magistrates, the police force, special anti-drug brigades, the legislative authorities, the mass media, schools, government ministries and various public and private organizations.

## **Basic health and first aid**

Awareness, teaching and training: these are the three key-words for one of the main objectives of the Lebanese Red Cross for 1979 and 1980 in the sphere of basic health and first aid. Seminars have been organized by education directors and have been held in different parts of the country so that a great number of people might take advantage of these meetings. Their purpose is to train workers in basic health and first aid, who later can teach these two useful subjects to different groups in the country. The aim is to spread as widely as possible the rudiments of basic health and first aid among all sections of the population, beginning with the least developed groups in the community.

Some courses are given to quite illiterate people, mostly young women, which does not render the task any easier. In many cases, the literacy class is combined with the teaching of one of the subjects, and very good results have been obtained in this way. This method was used at the Mousseitbé dispensary in Beirut, and at Ba'albek in the Bekaa' plain.

But first aid and basic health are not intended solely for people at the developing stage. Many sessions are also available for school-children and university students, and special classes are held at regular intervals for workers and leaders of other welfare organizations looking after children, handicapped persons and invalids. Everyone should be

capable of giving first aid in an emergency, just as everyone should know the essential notions of basic health. This is a very important step towards the improvement of public health and, consequently, the welfare of every community.

### **Voluntary workers**

There is a very important point that must be stressed at the conclusion of this report. The Lebanese Red Cross is performing a tremendous job in conditions which, at times, are exceedingly arduous, but it could achieve very little without the many voluntary workers who have willingly come forward to work under the Red Cross flag and who unstintingly give of their time and strength to provide aid for others. By their freely taken decision, they may be truly considered to be among the pick of the nation for, paid or unpaid, they have wholeheartedly thrown themselves into the task.

Without them, without such people always ready to step forward when called upon, who else could have worked without respite in the midst of gunfire, where the smallest movement, the slightest activity could be perilous, and where an attempt to cross a street might bring sudden death ?

To perform this work in the midst of civil war, to carry on without ever abandoning one's task, to keep contact notwithstanding the barriers set up by fanaticism and fierce opposition—that is the true Red Cross miracle, the real meaning of its flag, symbolized by “nameless, unremembered acts of heroism”, performed against a shining backcloth of charity.

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the Lebanese Red Cross*

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