

Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Cuba 1958-1962

by **Françoise Perret**

On 26 July 1953, a group opposing the regime of General Fulgencio Batista, led by Fidel Castro, made an abortive attempt to storm the Montecada barracks at Santiago de Cuba. Castro was captured and sentenced to 15 years in prison. In May 1955 he was released under a general amnesty; he left Cuba and emigrated to Mexico.

A year and a half later, on 2 December 1956, 82 armed men landed in Cuba. Government troops, however, surprised them: several men were killed, others arrested. Twelve rebels, including Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl and Che Guevara escaped and reached the Sierra Maestra. They managed to win the support of hundreds of partisans and by the end of 1957 were in control of part of the country. Gradually the conflict spread over the entire island, ending on 31 December 1958 with the victory of the rebels.

The new Cuban government set up a revolutionary regime in Havana, focusing its efforts on land reform. From 1960, Cuba moved closer to the communist bloc and its relations with the United States deteriorated. The Cuban government nationalized the assets held by North American companies. The United States hit back, reducing the quota of Cuban sugar it

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imported and then, on 10 October 1960, imposing a total embargo on all imports from and exports to Cuba. Cuba then received economic assistance from the Soviet Union and other East European countries, a source which was to dry up with the collapse of the communist regimes.

Opponents of the Castro regime found refuge in the United States, which helped them to attempt a landing in Cuba. On 14 April 1961 some 2,000 men landed at Playa Girón, better known as the “Bay of Pigs”. After three days of fighting they were crushed by the Cuban army, which took several thousand prisoners.

ICRC action

On 10 April 1958, as rebels and government forces fought in Cuba, the ICRC Presidential Council discussed the developments on the island. It came to the conclusion that the situation did not justify an offer of services to the two parties to the conflict. However, it accepted the Directorate’s proposal to send a telegram to the Cuban Red Cross, inviting the National Society to provide aid to the victims of the events and to ensure that the parties to the conflict respected Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which is applicable in non-international armed conflicts.¹

A telegram to this effect was sent to the Cuban Red Cross on 11 April 1958.

Three months later, on 3 July, the ICRC received the following telegram from Fidel Castro, sent via Caracas²:

After the latest battle in the Sierra Maestra, a great many wounded Batista soldiers remain in our hands. It has always been the rebels’ custom to care for enemy soldiers wounded in the fighting in our improvised hospitals, thereby saving the lives of many of them. This time, however, we cannot put our humanitarian principles fully into practice because there are too many casualties. For lack of beds, seriously wounded soldiers are lying on the ground, without even a blanket, and we are unable to provide them with the food which their condition requires. Medicines are in short supply because for a long

¹ Record of the ICRC Presidential Council meeting of 10 April 1958, ICRC Archives.

² Telegram of 3 July 1958 from Fidel Castro to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). — Original Spanish: ICRC translation.

time now Batista's army has taken strict measures to prevent their coming into rebel territory; and most of the medicines we had have been used to care for wounded prisoners. We have publicly proposed that a commission of the Cuban Red Cross should come to fetch the wounded and have stated that we are ready to hand them over so that they can receive the treatment they need. We have not set any conditions in exchange for their release and transfer to the Red Cross. However, incredible as it may seem, 72 hours have elapsed and we still have no reply. It seems clear that the Red Cross has not yet received the necessary authorization. These wounded men cannot wait. This is inhuman. It is absurd that Batista should object. These are not wounded rebels, but wounded soldiers of his own army, and only a traitor and a man feeling no gratitude towards the men who serve him would refuse the Red Cross, a humanitarian institution not involved in the conflict, permission to give them care they need. We cherish the hope that your glorious organization, with all the weight of its worldwide prestige and the nobility of its aims, will take steps to obtain from Batista, with no further delay, the safe-conduct needed to perform this humanitarian service.

Respectfully,

Fidel Castro, Commander-in-Chief of the rebel army
Sierra Maestra (Cuba), 3 July 1958

The ICRC communicated the content of this message the same day to the Cuban Red Cross, asking it what measures it intended to take and offering all necessary assistance. In particular, it suggested that a delegate should go to Cuba immediately. Not having any address at which to reach Fidel Castro, the ICRC broadcast a message on short-wave Swiss radio, telling Castro that it had forwarded his message to the Cuban Red Cross.

Castro confirmed his offer in a further telegram sent to the ICRC via Caracas on 6 July; the ICRC passed this information on to the Cuban Red Cross.³

On 9 July, the ICRC sent one of its delegates, Pierre Jequier, to Havana. His instructions were:

³Telegram of 6 July 1958 from Fidel Castro to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 200 (40).

- to contact the Cuban Red Cross and provide it with any assistance it might require to carry out its humanitarian tasks;
- to discuss with the Cuban Red Cross all humanitarian matters “falling within the traditional competence of the ICRC as a neutral intermediary providing assistance to victims of international or internal conflicts”;
- to draw the attention of his contacts to the provisions of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949;
- to contact the rebel forces “so as to ascertain their needs and, if necessary, make all appropriate arrangements with the Cuban Red Cross for equitable distribution of any relief supplies which might be required”. In this connection, the ICRC referred to Resolution XIX of the 19th International Red Cross Conference (New Delhi, 1957).⁴

Pierre Jequier was received by the leaders of the Cuban Red Cross, and subsequently by the President of the Republic, Fulgencio Batista. The Cuban government then declared itself ready to give the necessary orders to enable the Cuban Red Cross to take charge, in the presence of the ICRC delegate, of the wounded prisoners whom Fidel Castro had offered to hand over unconditionally. The government proposed that the transfer should take place near Bayamo, a town situated in an area close to the territory controlled by Castro’s men.

Pierre Jequier cabled this information to the ICRC on 12 July with the request that it be passed on to the leaders of the “rebel army”, as he himself had not been able to make direct contact with them. Castro was in fact communicating with the outside world through a radio transmitter in the Sierra

⁴ Instructions dated 9 July 1958 from Roger Gallopin, Executive Director of the ICRC, to Pierre Jequier for his mission to Cuba, ICRC Archives — 200 (4).

Resolution XIX, relating to relief in the event of internal disturbances, states:
“The XIXth International Red Cross Conference,
considering it necessary to ensure maximum efficiency and equity in the distribution of relief supplies in the event of internal disturbances,
declares that relief supplies of all types must be distributed equitably among the victims by the National Red Cross Society, without hindrance on the part of the local authorities,
considers that, in the event of the National Red Cross Society being unable to come to the assistance of the victims, or whenever it may be deemed necessary or urgent, the International Committee of the Red Cross should take the initiative for the distribution of relief supplies, in agreement with the authorities concerned,
requests authorities to grant the Red Cross every facility in carrying out relief actions.”

Maestra, whose broadcasts were relayed by a radio station set up in Caracas. The ICRC thus served as an intermediary between Castro and the Cuban government by forwarding their messages via Geneva and Caracas.

On 14 July, Fidel Castro informed the ICRC via Caracas that he accepted the proposal passed on by Jequier, but that the wounded soldiers could not be taken to the Bayamo area since that would mean a four-day march through the mountains. He suggested another meeting-point, but this proved to be difficult of access from the Sierra Maestra.

Castro also made the following appeal to the soldiers of the regular Cuban army, which were surrounded by his troops:⁵

Sierra Maestra, 16 July 1958

Soldiers,

The rebel army, convinced that resistance is useless and would only lead to greater bloodshed — with this battle which has already lasted for five days, and because this is a fight between Cubans —, offers you surrender on the following terms:

1. Only arms will be taken. All other personnel possessions will be respected.
2. The wounded will be handed over to the Red Cross, as is currently the case for the wounded soldiers taken prisoner during the battle of Santo Domingo.
3. All prisoners — soldiers, rank and file, officers — will be freed within 15 days.
4. Until handed over to the Red Cross, the wounded will be cared for in our hospitals by competent doctors and surgeons.
5. All members of this troop under siege will immediately receive cigars, food and everything they need.
6. No prisoner will be interrogated, maltreated or humiliated, by word or by deed; [on the contrary, every captured soldier] will receive the

⁵ Appeal of 16 July 1958 from the Sierra Maestra: Fidel Castro presented a photocopy of the handwritten appeal to ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga during the latter's official visit to Cuba on 13 September 1988. — Original Spanish: ICRC translation.

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Soldados:

Al ejército rebel-
 de, seguro de
 que toda resis-
 tencia es inútil
 y solo conduciría
 a mayores derramamientos de san-
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 lla que dura ya
 5 días, ~~o~~
^{y por} que se trata
 de una guerra

7

~~de~~ ni saber, la
suerte que pier-
den conser. Los
P: ~~Lo que dicen~~
~~resuando.~~

~~Fidel Castro B~~
~~Comandante Jefe~~
~~de las Fuerzas Rebeldes~~
Si se aceptan estas
condiciones, envíen
un hombre con ban-
dera blanca y diciendo
en voz alta: Parlemos,
Parlemos. ~~Fidel Castro~~
C. Jefe ~~de las Fuerzas~~

generous and humane treatment which we have always afforded to soldiers taken prisoner.

7. We shall immediately inform by radio the wife, mother, father and other members of the family of each one of you — all those who are at this moment weeping, in despair at having no news of you and not knowing what has become of you.

8. If you accept these conditions, send a man carrying a white flag and saying out loud that he wishes to parley.

Fidel Castro
Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces

On 15 July, Pierre Jequier travelled with staff from the Cuban Red Cross to Bayamo, where he talked to the head of military operations in the region. With the latter's agreement, he proposed a new plan for evacuating the wounded prisoners. The ICRC, which had sent a second delegate, Pierre Schoenholzer, to Cuba, passed on this proposal to Fidel Castro. On 20 July Castro sent the following counter-proposal: the wounded men would be transported by his men bearing a white flag to the nearest and most accessible point, where they would be handed over to the ICRC delegates. On receiving this proposal, the delegates forwarded it to the Cuban Red Cross and the authorities, which accepted it.⁶

A truce was thus declared on 23 and 24 July. The ICRC delegates travelled to the meeting-place proposed by Castro, an advance post of the Cuban army. There, they watched as a woman bearing a white flag approached on horseback. The woman told them that 50 wounded prisoners were nearby. She was then joined by Che Guevara, who told the delegates that 200 more prisoners were a bit further away, to the rear. The Cuban army agreed to accept all these prisoners and they arrived in small groups, the most seriously wounded being carried by their comrades. They were immediately given first aid by three Cuban Red Cross doctors and then transported in an army helicopter. In this operation 253 wounded and sick men were handed over to the Cuban Red Cross and the Cuban army, under the auspices of the ICRC.

⁶ Note of 12 July 1958 from Pierre Jequier to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). Radiogram of 15 July 1958 from Ernesto Capo (Caracas) to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). Internal note of 20 April 1958 from Pierre Jequier to Pierre Vibert, ICRC Archives - 200 (40).

On 24 July Che Guevara sent a note signed in his hand to the ICRC delegates. Its aim was to seek the ICRC's "recognition of a delegation of our Revolutionary Movement in the Republic of Venezuela" so that the said delegation could give the ICRC a list of the medicines urgently needed by Castro's army. In fact, the ICRC was already in contact with the representative of Castro in Caracas who was transmitting messages between Geneva and the Sierra Maestra. In response to the request for medicines, the ICRC delegates gave the Cuban Red Cross 2,000 US dollars⁷ to buy them locally and send them to its contacts with the revolutionary army.⁸

In the belief that its two delegates had concluded their mission in Cuba, the ICRC recalled them to headquarters on 28 July.⁹

Second ICRC mission to Cuba

The Cuban Civic Revolutionary Front in exile (*Frente Cívico Revolucionario*), made up of all the parties opposed to the Batista government, sent an official representative to the ICRC on 13 August 1958. This was Professor Roberto Agramonte, who had taught at the University of Havana and would be appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new Cuban government after Castro's victory. He handed over a detailed report on the situation in Cuba and requested that ICRC delegates visit Cuban prisoners held by the government forces on one side and by the revolutionary forces on the other.¹⁰

The ICRC now decided to send another delegate, Maurice Thudichum, to Cuba. He arrived in Havana on 9 September 1958 and made a number of approaches to the Batista government with a view to undertaking protection and assistance activities for all the victims of the conflict. However, he was rebuffed and returned to Geneva on 10 October.

⁷The dollar was worth much more then than it is now.

⁸Note of 24 July 1958 from Che Guevara, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). Telegram of 26 July 1958 from Pierre Jequier to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 202 (40). Record of the meeting of the Presidential Council of 14 August 1958, ICRC Archives. See *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge (RICR)*, No. 476, August 1958, pp. 413-414, and "Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et le conflit de Cuba", *RICR*, No. 485, May 1959, pp. 227-236.

⁹Telephone call of 28 July 1958 from Pierre Jequier to Roger Gallopin, ICRC Archives — 251 (45).

¹⁰Professor Agramonte's report to the ICRC of 13 August 1958, ICRC Archives — 200 (40).

The ICRC continued its efforts to persuade the representatives of General Batista to allow further action in Cuba. These efforts resulted in failure.¹¹

On 30 December 1958, on the eve of the collapse of the Batista regime, the ICRC launched an appeal to the two parties by cable and radio, urging them to respect the spirit of the 1949 Geneva Conventions (ratified by Cuba on 15 April 1954) and to apply all the provisions of common Article 3.¹²

The ICRC's return to Cuba after Fidel Castro's victory

On 1 January 1959, the ICRC received a call from the new leaders of the Cuban Red Cross and decided to send an envoy to Cuba. Pierre Jequier left on 3 January. His instructions for this mission were to assist the Cuban Red Cross and "to carry out the ICRC's traditional activities for all victims of the events", in accordance with the ICRC's humanitarian principles and Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions.

On his arrival, Pierre Jequier was welcomed by the Cuban Red Cross. On 10 January he was received by the new President of the Republic, Dr Manuel Urrutia, who promised to respect the provisions of the Geneva Conventions relating to the treatment of "military prisoners".¹³ The next day, Pierre Jequier visited an internment camp in which about 400 officers and soldiers, as well as policemen and civilians, were being held.¹⁴

The ICRC delegate also met Fidel Castro. On 30 January 1959 he had a meeting with Foreign Minister Roberto Agramonte, who expressed his disappointment on hearing that the ICRC had been unable to take any action to protect civilians who had fallen into the hands of the Batista police. In his view, the ICRC enjoyed great moral standing but had not used it to exert pressure on the former government. Pierre Jequier

¹¹ Record of the meeting of 14 August of the Presidential Council, ICRC Archives. Note of 14 September 1998 from Maurice Thudichum to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). Record of the meetings of 13 November and 11 December 1958 of the Presidential Council, ICRC Archives, *RICR*, No. 485, May 1959, pp. 232-234.

¹² ICRC's message of 30 December 1958, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). *RICR*, No. 485, May 1959, p. 234.

¹³ ICRC press release of 9 January 1959, ICRC Archives — 200 (40). Mission report of 14 January 1959 by Pierre Jequier, ICRC Archives — 200 (40).

¹⁴ Mission report of 18 January 1959 by Pierre Jequier, ICRC Archives — 200 (40).

explained that the ICRC's inability to help civilian victims of the regime had been due to the fact that in a situation of conflict within a State it could act only with the consent of the government in power, and that in this case all its approaches had been rebuffed. He requested permission to continue his visits to detainees, but the Minister reserved his decision.¹⁵

At its meeting of 12 February 1959, the ICRC Presidential Council discussed the organization's attitude during the Cuban conflict. Some members of the Council expressed regret that the ICRC had not "followed a firmer and better-defined line" and had not "devoted a little more attention at the time to the appeals made by the rebels". They also regretted the fact that the three delegates sent to Cuba had not stayed there longer, but noted that, although they had been "impotent witnesses to acts which were totally unacceptable in humanitarian terms", the delegates might have given the impression that the ICRC was endorsing those acts by its presence. The Council further wondered, in general, whether the ICRC should publicly denounce facts of which it was aware. It noted that all those questions of principle had already been discussed several times within the ICRC, without any final conclusion emerging, and it asked the Directorate to consider them again as a matter of urgency.¹⁶ The working group set up for this purpose met on 25 February and the following day proposed to the Presidential Council that the ICRC should convene, on 1 October 1959 (after the meeting of the Board of Governors of the League,¹⁷ due to take place in Athens on 30 September), a commission of experts with special competence in the sphere of conflict situations within a State. The Council accepted this proposal, recalling that the ICRC had already convened two expert commissions in 1953 and 1955 to examine the question of aid to political detainees.¹⁸

However, on 20 February Pierre Jequier received Foreign Minister Agramonte's permission to resume visits to political detainees. On 9 March, he visited the country's main prison, La Cabaña, where a thousand prisoners were being held.¹⁹

¹⁵Note of 30 January 1959 from Pierre Jequier to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 202 (40). *RICR*, No. 485, May 1959, p. 235.

¹⁶Record of the meeting of the Presidential Council of 12 February 1959, ICRC Archives.

¹⁷Now the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

¹⁸Record of the meeting of the Presidential Council of 26 February 1959.

¹⁹Mission report of 19 March 1959 by Pierre Jequier, ICRC Archives — 200 (40).

Pierre Jequier returned to Geneva on 14 March to report to the ICRC. He left again for Cuba on 26 April with another delegate, Pierre Claude Delarue. On their arrival they approached the Cuban authorities and Red Cross with a view to drawing up a comprehensive plan of visits to places of detention throughout the country.

The first visits started on 7 February 1959: without giving any advance warning of their arrival, the delegates visited *El Castillo del Principe*, a large municipal prison in Havana where 600 political detainees were being held at the time. They moved freely through the premises and talked without witnesses to any detainees they wished. They also visited, for the second time, the fortress of La Cabaña, where they noted that conditions of detention had improved considerably.

On 12 May 1959 the delegates visited the Cuban national penitentiary on the Isle of Pines, where almost 600 political prisoners were being held. The visit proceeded in the same conditions as in the other prisons. Next, they visited the women's penitentiary at Guanajay, near Havana. At the end of each visit, the delegates sent a report to the authorities and to the Cuban Red Cross, which took part in the visits.

The delegates subsequently extended their visits to all Cuban prisons and were not required to give any advance notice.²⁰ Having completed their tour, they left Cuba in July.

During the meeting of the League Board of Governors held in Athens on 30 September 1959, the ICRC raised the question of "ICRC action in aid of victims of civil wars and internal disturbances" in a paper presented by its Executive Director, Roger Gallopin. The situation in Cuba was described as follows:

Attempts, mostly unsuccessful, were made in the course of last year and under the former regime to come to the assistance of all victims of the Cuban conflict.

The difficulties encountered by the ICRC were outlined at the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the League. If the delegation of the Cuban Red Cross had been present, it would doubtless have

²⁰ Record of the meeting of 23 July 1959 of the Presidential Council, ICRC Archives, *RICR*, No. 488, August 1959, pp. 392-394. *Le CICR et le conflit de Cuba 1958-1959*, Geneva, 1963, pp. 16-19.

described its experiences itself. Suffice it to say that, immediately following the establishment of the new regime in Cuba, the ICRC delegates drew up a comprehensive plan of visits to places of detention throughout Cuba, in cooperation with the Cuban Red Cross and authorities.

The ICRC in fact cancelled a meeting on Red Cross action in the event of civil war, scheduled to take place in Geneva on 1 October 1959, because too few participants had registered. The meeting was not in fact held until October 1962.²¹

Unsuccessful approaches in Havana

The year 1960 was marked by a serious deterioration in US-Cuban relations. The Cuban government, which had gravitated closer to the communist bloc since the end of 1959, began to nationalize American companies in the summer of 1960. The United States responded on 10 October 1960 by imposing a total ban on imports from and exports to Cuba. In addition, the United States government gave its support to opponents of the Castro regime who had fled to the United States, and this led to the landing at the "Bay of Pigs" on 14 April 1961.

The Cubans in exile, however, appealed to the ICRC for help because, they said, the conditions of detention in Cuban prisons were deteriorating daily.

In a letter of 11 February 1960 addressed to the Cuban Red Cross, the ICRC mentioned its earlier action in Cuba and suggested that ICRC delegates might carry out a further series of visits in the country. The President of the Cuban Red Cross replied to the ICRC President on 6 April, stating that his National Society had visited the main Cuban prisons and that although they were indeed overcrowded work was under way to enlarge them. He also said that his Society was in contact with the families of detainees, but that in some cases the Cuban authorities had had to suspend family visits because there had been uprisings in the prisons where they had taken place. The letter contained no reference to the ICRC's proposal to send a delegate to Cuba.

²¹"Action du CICR en faveur des victimes de guerres civiles et troubles intérieurs", *RICR*, No. 491, November 1959, pp. 571-578. "Humanitarian aid to the victims of internal conflicts", *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 23, February 1963, pp. 79-91. Record of the meeting of the Presidential Council of 15 October 1959, ICRC Archives.

On 29 April the ICRC President again proposed to the President of the Cuban Red Cross that an ICRC delegate be sent to Cuba.²² The reply was negative. The ICRC nevertheless continued its representations, and on 18 July the Executive Board decided that Pierre Jequier would carry out a general mission to several Latin American countries, including Cuba, in September. In Cuba, he would endeavour to obtain permission to visit places of detention.

When the ICRC informed the Cuban Red Cross of Pierre Jequier's forthcoming mission, however, the President of the National Society replied that the presence of an ICRC delegate in Cuba was unnecessary and that when the Cuban Red Cross felt that such a visit was timely it would immediately inform the Committee.²³

Subsequently, the ICRC continued to receive appeals for help from Cubans in exile. It informed them that it could not send a mission to Cuba because the government would not permit it to do so. Finally, on 20 February 1961, when United States-Cuban relations were very strained, the ICRC tried one last approach to the authorities in Havana. ICRC President Léopold Boissier sent Fidel Castro a letter in which he mentioned the visits carried out by the ICRC in Cuba and other countries to assist political detainees; he proposed dispatching another mission to Havana so that its delegates could visit persons arrested and deprived of their freedom for political reasons.²⁴ The ICRC received no reply to this letter and renewed its offer in vain in a telegram dated 24 April 1961, or 10 days after the "Bay of Pigs" landing.

In July 1961, the Executive Director of the ICRC asked Pierre Jequier, then on mission in Latin America, to do everything possible to go to

²²Letter of 11 February 1960 from Roger Gallopin, ICRC Executive Director, to Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, President of the Cuban Red Cross, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Record of the meeting of 25 February 1960 of the Presidential Council, ICRC Archives. Letter of 6 April 1960 from Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, President of the Cuban Red Cross, to Léopold Boissier, President of the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Letter of 29 April 1960 from Léopold Boissier to Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

²³Letter of 6 June 1960 from Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, President of the Cuban Red Cross, to Léopold Boissier, President of the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Record of the meeting of 28 July 1960 of the President's Council, ICRC Archives. Letter of 4 August 1960 from Roger Gallopin, Executive Director of the ICRC, to Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Letter of 22 August 1960 from Gilberto Cervantez Núñez to Roger Gallopin, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

²⁴Letter of 20 February 1961 from Léopold Boissier, President of the ICRC, to Fidel Castro, Prime Minister, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

Havana and meet Cuban Red Cross leaders in order to obtain permission to visit political detainees. However, as the President of the Cuban Red Cross had informed Jequier that he could not receive him, Jequier had to abandon his plans to visit Cuba.

In October 1961 the Council of Delegates (made up of delegations from National Societies, the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies) met in Prague; there, Pierre Jequier met representatives of the Cuban Red Cross, including its President, Gilberto Cervantez Núñez, to whom he repeated the ICRC's proposal to send a mission to Cuba.²⁵ Following this contact, the ICRC Executive Director, Roger Gallopin, proposed to the Cuban Minister for Foreign Affairs, Raúl Roa, that Pierre Jequier should go to Havana to observe the work being done by the Cuban Red Cross and, perhaps, to assist it in its new activities. Mr Roa replied to the ICRC on 18 January 1962 that the delegate's mission was not advisable.

On 23 March, when the fighters captured during the "Bay of Pigs" landing were about to be tried, the ICRC sent the following telegram to Fidel Castro:

Cuban Government — Havana

Informed by families trial 29 March next of fighters captured Playa Girón April 61 stop If this information correct presume that provisions Article 3 Geneva Conventions ratified by Cuban Government will be fully applied stop Remind you our earlier offers of services and renew them in hope that as is customary these prisoners will be able receive visit by ICRC delegate for strictly humanitarian assistance stop Highest consideration President International Committee Red Cross = intercroixrouge A6070.²⁶

On 6 April 1962, the Federal Political Department (the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs) communicated to the ICRC the contents of a letter

²⁵Telegram of 24 April 1961 from the ICRC to Fidel Castro, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Note of 12 July 1961 from Roger Gallopin to Pierre Jequier, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Telegram of 19 July 1961 from Pierre Jequier to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). Note of 9 October 1961 from Pierre Jequier to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

²⁶Telegram of 23 March 1962 from the ICRC to Fidel Castro, ICRC Archives — 225 (40). See also letter of 3 November 1961 from Roger Gallopin, ICRC Executive Director, to Raúl Roa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, ICRC Archives — 225 (40), and letter of 18 January 1962 from Raúl Roa to Roger Gallopin, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

which it had just received from the Swiss ambassador to Cuba concerning the trial of 1,179 prisoners captured during the attempted invasion of Cuba in April 1961. The Swiss diplomat stated that, during an audience with ambassadors to Cuba held at the house of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Raúl Roa, the latter had asked him whether he had any request to make in connection with the trial. The ambassador had reminded Mr Roa of the offer of services made in a telegram from the ICRC to Fidel Castro, and Mr Roa had said that he would immediately contact the Head of State on the matter. The ambassador concluded: "In my view, depending on the way the trial turns out, it is by no means certain that a specific intervention by the ICRC in this matter would be unwelcome to the Cuban Government."

In the next few weeks Ambassador Stadelhofer continued his approaches to the Cuban authorities, but did not achieve any tangible result.²⁷

On 6 June, Roger Gallopin and Pierre Jequier went to the Cuban embassy in Bern, where they met Ambassador José Ruiz Velasco. They informed him of the recent representations made by the ICRC to the Cuban authorities and of the contacts in Cuba between the Swiss ambassador and Mr Roa. They repeated the proposal to send an ICRC delegate to Cuba and the ambassador agreed to pass the proposal on to his country's authorities.²⁸

Ambassador Stadelhofer pursued his contacts with Mr Roa and the President of the Cuban Red Cross over the next few months, but to no avail. The doors were closed to the ICRC, which did not obtain permission to send delegates to Cuba for many years to come.

²⁷ Letter of 6 April 1962 from the (Swiss) Federal Political Department to the ICRC, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).

²⁸ Record of the conversation of 6 June 1962, ICRC Archives — 225 (40).