

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1947-1948)

Rubrik: Palestine

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VI. Palestine

When at the end of 1947, the British Government once more announced its irrevocable decision to abandon the Palestine Mandate and to withdraw all British forces on May 15, 1948, it was plain that, unless the Powers stepped in to maintain order, a conflict between Arabs and Jews was to be expected.

The ICRC at once began preparations, so that, should it be required to act, it might do so as effectively as possible. The Cairo Delegation had been instructed to collect information on the spot when, on January 5, 1948, the ICRC received through the British Government a request from the High Commissioner for Palestine, asking the Red Cross to send doctors and nurses to take over the hospitals when the British authorities left. In response to this appeal, the ICRC sent a mission from Geneva, composed of Dr. Roland Marti, head of the Medical Division, and M. Jacques de Reynier. They met the ICRC Delegate in Cairo, M. A. de Cocatrix, and went with him to Palestine. In Cairo, where he remained from January 20-28, 1948, Dr. Marti explained the purpose of his mission to the Premier, Nokrachy Pasha, and to the members of the Egyptian Government; he also saw Azzam Pacha, Secretary-General of the Arab League, and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In Palestine, he had talks with the British authorities and with the Arab and Jewish representatives.

The situation continued to deteriorate. Outrages on both sides led to reprisals; public unrest was steadily working up, and the worst might be expected the day the British left.

With the consent of the High Commissioner in Palestine, the ICRC representatives made a complete tour of the country. The journey enabled them to make an inventory of available beds in hospitals and dispensaries, medical and surgical stocks, and the

medicaments needed. The Arabs had no reserves of medicaments, blood or blood plasma, whilst even the smallest and most remote Jewish communities seemed to be well supplied. The problem of ambulances threatened to grow acute. The *Magen David Adom* (Red Shield of David), an organisation similar to the Red Cross but not working under its emblem, had thirty-one modern ambulances, whereas the Palestine Government had a few only. The Mission hospitals would make a very appreciable contribution, but in most cases they looked to the ICRC for help and protection.

Having thus made a general review of requirements and defined the tasks of the medical and health services, the ICRC mission drew up a working plan to place hospitals under Red Cross protection and to ensure the continuity of their work, until whatever government did eventually come to power could restore normal conditions.

Success of the scheme implied recognition by the belligerents of the principles of the Geneva Conventions. On March 12, 1948, the ICRC therefore launched an appeal to the Arab and Jewish populations and their representative authorities in Palestine; this appeal was published in the local press and broadcast in several languages from Jerusalem towards the end of March. The appeal was worded as follows :

Although the incidents in Palestine do not constitute an armed conflict between two Powers, the International Committee believes it to be its duty, in the interest of those who are the victims, to call upon both sides — unless they decide meanwhile to abandon the use of force — to act in obedience to the accepted rules of International Law and to apply, as from today, the principles embodied in the two Geneva Conventions of July 27, 1929.

The first of these Conventions deals with the relief of the Sick and Wounded, and the second with the treatment of Prisoners of War.

In the spirit of these Conventions, the International Committee wishes to emphasise the following humanitarian principles :

- (1)—The protection of the sick and wounded, who must be treated without discrimination in a spirit of humanity and receive the care which their condition demands. Vehicles transporting the sick and wounded, hospitals, fixed and mobile, as well as medical personnel and medical stores, shall be respected and protected in all circumstances.

- (2)—Respect to the dead, that is, to their remains and the funeral arrangements for their burial.
- (3)—Security for all who are non-combatant, in particular women, children and the aged.
- (4)—The right of every combatant falling into the hands of the adverse party to be treated as a prisoner of war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, referring to proclamations already published in the above sense by the *Magen David Adom* and by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Palestine, appeals also to the responsible Authorities, to the Arab and Jewish peoples, and to all who speak in their name. The Committee invites them to observe the minimum conditions given above and awaits on this point their formal confirmation; it believes such an agreement to be imperative for the accomplishment, in harmony with the principles it is called upon to defend, of relief work for those who are victims of the present unhappy events.

On April 4 and 5, 1948, M. de Reynier, who had been appointed ICRC Delegate in Jerusalem, received the following replies.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency in Palestine and of the *Vaad Leumi* (General Council of the Jewish Community of Palestine) :

We beg to give you formal assurance that the competent Jewish authorities in Palestine will, during the present conflict, respect the Geneva Conventions of 1929, both in regard to military personnel and to the civilian population, in so far as the said Conventions apply to the civilian population.

(signed) Iddie MYERSON.
D. BEN-ZEVIE.

From the Arab Higher Committee :

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of the appeal issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross, dated Geneva, March 12, 1948, and in reply beg to inform you that the Arab Higher Committee, representing the Arab people of Palestine, having perused the said appeal and in conformity with Arab and Moslem tradition and customs in respect of humanitarian issues, agree and will do everything humanly possible to abide by the minimum conditions enumerated in the above-mentioned appeal.

(signed) Dr. H.F. KHALIDI.
Secretary.

On April 7, 1948, the ICRC Delegate in Cairo also received the following reply from the League of Arab States :

(Translation)

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of March 30 last, together with the memorandum containing an appeal for the application in Palestine of the principles of the Geneva Conventions.

I thank you for the communication, which has received my careful attention, and have not failed to bring the appeal to the notice of the Arab Higher Committee. I feel convinced that the Arabs of Palestine are observing, in this struggle, the humanitarian principles embodied in the Geneva Conventions, which are, I may add, in conformity with their religious teachings, and their traditions. The moral support of the Arab League is fully assured to that effect.

It is nevertheless evident that to attain the humane purpose which is the aim of the International Committee of the Red Cross in making its praiseworthy appeal, the support of both parties concerned in Palestine is necessary, if the principles in question are to be respected.

I have the honour, etc.

(signed) A.R. AZZAM.
Secretary-General.

Meanwhile, the United Nations representatives in Palestine were kept informed of the proposed scheme, and approved wholeheartedly. The fact that the General Assembly abandoned its plan for the partition of Palestine did not affect either the aims or the work of the ICRC; the situation remained difficult, and as May 15, 1948, approached, incidents multiplied.

The Committee's working plan was based on the dispatch of eight medical delegates and ten nurses to Palestine. This staff was at once engaged and held ready to leave. Roughly one million Swiss francs was required to finance the scheme. Nine-tenths of this sum was ensured with the help of (1) the British Treasury, which undertook to subscribe £ 30,000 (about 500,000 Swiss francs), (2) the Jewish Agency, which agreed to pay £ 1,000 monthly, and (3) the Arab Governments of the countries bordering Palestine. The last-named, after Dr. Marti's second journey, agreed to contribute the same amount as the Jewish Agency; payment was guaranteed by the League of Arab States.

The doctors and nurses took up duty at the end of April, 1948. As representatives of the ICRC, they were instructed on leaving Geneva to relieve suffering wherever they could, and, in accordance with Red Cross principles, with absolute impartiality and equal regard for both sides.

Some days before May 15, 1948, everything was ready, and the ICRC had advanced the working funds.

As soon as the British troops had left, the struggle between Arabs and Jews broke out in full bitterness. Jerusalem was shortly after the centre of fighting. The ICRC Delegation aimed first of all at helping the wounded, ensuring protection for hospitals and ambulances, and establishing Security Zones.

On May 9 and May 17 respectively, it obtained the consent, in principle, of Arabs and Jews to the creation, on the following conditions, of three such Zones.

The Zones were to be placed under the protection of the Red Cross flag; in a spirit of absolute neutrality, all categories of non-combatants were to be admitted : women with children, expectant mothers, the aged, the infirm, the wounded and the sick; no one would be allowed to introduce arms; the representatives of the ICRC in charge were to ensure strict observance of the regulations, and to guarantee by their presence that the Zones would be respected as a neutral shelter solely for non-combatants.

The first Zone comprised the buildings, annexes and grounds of the King David Hotel and the YMCA Hostel, as well as the Terra Santa Hospice, the second included the grounds and buildings of Government House, the Arab College, the Jewish Agricultural School and the married quarters of the Allenby Barracks; the third was the Italian School and Hospital.

After this initial success, the Delegation started negotiations for the extension of the security zones, to take in the whole city of Jerusalem and the Holy Places.

Soon, however, Geneva learned that one of nurses had been seriously wounded on duty, that a Delegate had also been wounded, that another had been molested, and that negotiations for an extension of the Security Zones were suspended. On May 21, 1948, the ICRC issued the following appeal to the belligerents :

The International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, in its anxiety to ensure the greatest possible safeguards in the Palestine conflict for the principles of humanitarian conduct which it is bound to defend, today addresses an appeal to the Governments of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Transjordan; as well as to the Government of Israel.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, deeply concerned by the serious state of affairs in Palestine and moved solely by the anxiety to protect the greatest number possible of human lives, conveys to the Governments the following earnest appeal, which is founded on the principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

From April onwards the International Committee, acting in agreement with the Arab and Jewish civil and military authorities and with the approval of the Palestine Government, was on the point of establishing Security Zones in Jerusalem, for the reception of the non-combatant population and its protection against the consequences of military operations. At the beginning of May, a scheme was also under consideration to neutralise the whole of Jerusalem, subject to the general consent of the Authorities. The negotiations were not concluded in time, and fighting is now going on in Jerusalem. The International Committee of the Red Cross therefore appeals to the Governments and earnestly begs them to take all necessary steps to ensure at least respect for the Security Zones which the International Committee's Delegation is endeavouring, by all possible means, to establish in the town itself, according to their initial plan. The Committee's appeal applies similarly to the Security Zones that the Delegation may attempt to set up in other towns in Palestine. The purpose of these Security Zones is to shelter non-combatants, under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross, particularly Arabs and Jews, and thus to preserve the greatest number possible of human lives...

At the same time the President of the ICRC, M. Paul Ruegger, decided to leave for Palestine, there to make a personal study of the situation.

When the Arabs took the Old Town of Jerusalem, the President conducted the negotiations which finally allowed the evacuation of Jewish women and children, and the removal of the wounded to a place of safety. He also induced the Jewish authorities to hand over Arab wounded, and to release the Arab women.

Such was the situation when Count Bernadotte, Mediator for the United Nations, persuaded both parties to conclude a truce of one month — as demanded by the Security Council — and a cease-fire to operate from 7 a.m. on Wednesday, June 9, 1948.

It seemed unlikely that the truce would end the conflict. The possibility of renewed fighting made it necessary to place the Committee's operations in Palestine on a firmer basis. Strictly speaking, the work far exceeded the recognized function of a neutral intermediary like the ICRC. There was a risk that, if the situation deteriorated still further, the responsibilities assumed by the Committee might, in the long run, exceed its capacity to meet them. Geneva therefore decided to continue the work which lay by tradition within the scope of the Conventions, namely, the protection of hospitals and security zones, the preparation of lists of prisoners of war, camp visits and the organisation of relief.

As a consequence of this policy, the ICRC Delegation was reorganised on June 10, 1948.

Jerusalem was no longer a political centre where permanent contact with the authorities could be maintained. Two doctors and four nurses only were therefore left in the city to ensure the proper working of the Security Zones. Delegation headquarters were set up simultaneously at Tel-Aviv and at Amman, and a base office was opened in Beirut. Delegates were appointed to various districts; those in the Jewish area were stationed at Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Jaffa, while those in the Arab area had headquarters at Ramallah, Gaza and Tiberias. The six nurses not required in the Security Zones assisted the other Delegates. Such was the framework within which the ICRC carried on during the following months, when, in spite of truces more or less respected, hostilities between Arabs and Jews continued.

Security Zones. — The ICRC Delegation in Jerusalem agreed, on June 15, 1948, to exclude the King David Hotel from Zone No. 1, and to put the building at the disposal of the United Nations Mediator. The Red Cross flag was then replaced by that of the United Nations. When the truce ended, on July 9, the United Nations staff left the Hotel, which was immediately occupied by Jewish forces; it thus became a military objective and was at once attacked by the Arabs, the Jews replying to their fire. The fighting endangered the two other principal buildings of the Zone, the YMCA Hostel and the Terra Santa Hospice. The Delegation demanded that the Jewish forces should be withdrawn; this did

not prove possible and Security Zone No. 1 was accordingly suppressed. The YMCA Hostel was returned to the owners and became part of the buildings under the protection of the United States Consulate. Likewise, the Terra Santa Hospice was restored to the Franciscan monks.

On July 17, 1948, another ICRC Delegate was so seriously injured while attending to the wounded near the Old Town of Jerusalem that his right arm had to be amputated.

In July, Security Zone No. 3 had also to be relinquished.

The continued existence of the remaining Zone No. 2 was gravely threatened by the fighting that took place on August 16-17, in the immediate neighbourhood of the former Government House. The Jewish forces occupied the Arab College and the Jewish Agricultural School, and the Red Cross flag had to be hauled down from the latter. Government House and its grounds, although not occupied, were considered by the Arabs as Arab territory, and defensive positions were created round the whole area.

In consequence of the Committee's protest and of steps taken by the United Nations representative, General Landstroem, who proposed that all armed forces should be withdrawn and an extensive demilitarised area created round the Security Zone itself, the latter was once more established and placed under the protection of the Red Cross flag.

Unfortunately, it soon became evident that the situation of Zone No. 2 was becoming extremely precarious, situated as it was at a strategically important point between the lines. After numerous alarms and incidents from both sides, the ICRC was obliged to haul down its flag and finally abandon the Zone, since it no longer fulfilled its purpose and persons seeking refuge in it could not be guaranteed safety. Furthermore, communications with the outside world were highly dangerous, as an area of incessant fighting had to be crossed.

The attempt, however, had not been in vain. The fact that the Security Zones had to be abandoned does not exclude the possibility of creating others in the future. The attempt made in Palestine, even if it was only short-lived, has shown that such a scheme can be fruitful, given the necessary goodwill. It is also

to be remembered that in Jerusalem the zones were actually set up in the fighting area itself, whereas the Draft Conventions discussed at Stockholm provided expressly that such zones shall not be situated in areas that will, in all probability, become important for the actual conduct of operations.

Events in Palestine have shown that this precaution is fully justified. It is also clear that Security Zones created for humanitarian purposes under the pressure of events and close to frontline positions may have a very real value, even if they last only a limited time.

Protection of Hospitals. — The ICRC Delegation used its influence to arrange that the Government hospitals, now deprived of their British staffs, should be handed over to the municipal authorities; in this, it was generally successful. The Jerusalem Government Hospital and two hospitals in Bethlehem had the protection of the Red Cross flag, and under an agreement between the ICRC and the Arab Medical Association, the management passed to the latter. Thanks to this arrangement, the Arab hospital staff agreed to remain on, and the hospitals, while continuing to nurse civilian patients, were also in practice made available to the armed forces. Other hospitals and dispensaries belonging to foreign organisations (the Bethany Infirmary, the Italian Hospital and School, the American Colony Casualty Clearing Station, etc.), were entrusted by them to the ICRC; they had the protection of the Red Cross emblem and, in agreement with the Jews, were at the disposal of the Arab Medical Association.

Reciprocally, the Delegation had the emblem of the *Magen David Adom* accepted and respected, not only by the Palestine Arabs, but also by the League of Arab States, in spite of the fact that this emblem, strictly speaking, had no official standing. A great many Jewish ambulances, on the request of ICRC Delegation, were thus respected. The British Mission Hospital in Jerusalem, now in the care of the ICRC, was allotted to the *Magen David Adom*, to be used and managed by it, as was also the Bat-Yam Asylum at Jaffa.

The protection of the ICRC was particularly valuable for Arab hospitals situated in the Jewish area. At Jaffa, protection

was extended to the Municipal Hospital, the French Hospital, the Mekor Hayim Hospital and the polyclinic; here, also, the ICRC helped doctors by preventing their cars from being requisitioned. At Ramleh, part of the equipment of a hospital under the Egyptian Red Crescent had been seized; on the Delegate's representations, it was unconditionally restored by the Jewish authorities and sent to Ramallah. At Nazareth, protection was granted to the French Hospital and the Scottish Mission Hospital, to both of which medicaments and blood plasma had been allocated.

Prisoners of War. — The ICRC successfully brought relief to prisoners, thanks to the helpful attitude of both Jewish and Arab authorities. The Delegates' proposals were always most favourably received, and supervision of camps was freely allowed. Within a relatively short time, the Delegation was given nominal rolls, and could visit the camps and arrange for the exchange of mail between prisoners and their relatives. During the first three months, some 2,000 prisoners were visited and assisted by the ICRC Delegates in Egypt, in Transjordan, and in Arab and Jewish Palestine. Several thousand cards and letters were exchanged with the Delegates' help, without supervision or censorship, but always to the knowledge of the officials, and in fact, at their request.

Mail for Jews in Arab camps, or for Arabs in Jewish camps went through the ICRC, which forwarded it.

For the better information of relatives, the Delegates arranged showings of photographs, illustrating the life of Jewish prisoners in Arab hands, in particular those in Mafrak Camp. All men in the camp were photographed in groups of twenty, and enlargements exhibited first in Jerusalem, and then at Tel-Aviv and Haifa. The shows were very successful; relatives of the prisoners went in crowds to see them and were able to order copies.

From April to June, 1948, 53 camp visits were made: five camps for Arabs in Palestine were visited on 22 occasions, whilst 31 visits (15 in Transjordan, nine in Syria and seven in Egypt) were made to Jewish prisoners of war.

Civilian Population. — The Delegates also gave help to civilian war victims.

The exchange of Civilian Messages was organised and missing civilians were traced. During the months July-December, 1948, the number of enquiries grew steadily, as the total of missing, especially on the Arab side, was very large. Many applicants lived in Arab districts occupied by the Jews or incorporated into territory under their control. Enquiries also came from the many thousands of refugees who were living in the countries bordering Palestine. To cope with this steadily increasing task, the Delegates in Tel-Aviv organised a network of Arab correspondents in the occupied Arab districts, principally at Jaffa, Lydda, Ramleh, Acre and Nazareth. The correspondents were appointed always in full agreement with the Jewish authorities, and their work proved most useful.

Relief for civilian prisoners was given concurrently with that for the military. While there were no civilian internees properly so-called, the camps held civilian prisoners whom both sides placed on the same footing as the combatants.

During the early weeks of the conflict, the entire population was exposed to the risks inseparable from armed fighting; the ICRC managed, on several occasions, to save civilians thus exposed. On June 18, 1948, in the region of Tulkarm, some 40 miles from Tel-Aviv, 1,100 Arab women, children and old people were allowed to leave the area occupied by the Jewish forces and were taken to Arab territory by the Delegation. The day after the attack on Jaffa, the Delegation persuaded the Jews to allow over 30,000 persons to pass unharmed on a six-mile front through the Jewish lines, and to take shelter in the Arab zone. Similarly, the Delegation arranged for the transport of 170 Egyptian nationals from Jerusalem to the Egyptian frontier. In August 1948, during the evacuation of three encircled Arab villages, the ICRC Delegate had a narrow escape, when his car was destroyed by a mine.

Refugees. — The plight of these unfortunate civilians was soon to give rise to one of the most harrowing problems of the Palestine conflict — the problem of the refugees.

Most of the Palestine Arabs who, voluntarily or not, left their homes under the threat of war, took refuge in the Arab Zone of Palestine. Certain towns and large villages had their population doubled in the space of a few days. Some refugees were lodged in houses, but most of them lived in the open, their only shelter being tents under the olive trees. No protective health measures were taken. Refugees who had moved to Transjordan, Syria or the Lebanon had no work and were almost all destitute. In camps, they were for the most part poorly fed, badly looked after and demoralized. The ICRC did its best to help with the scanty means available. Nurses were sent to the camps to organise mass vaccination and to give first-aid to the sick and injured. But the task, in the absence of the necessary resources, was frankly impossible. Accordingly, the International Committee and the League of Red Cross Societies, launched a joint appeal, on May 12, 1948, to the National Red Cross Societies of Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, as well as to the following agencies: Auxilium Catholicum Internationale; Caritas Catholica Internationalis; World Council of Churches; American Friends Service Committee; World Health Organisation; United Nations Appeal for Children; International Union for Child Welfare; Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA); Young Women's Christian Associations (YMCA). In this way it was hoped to concentrate all the sources of help with the least loss of time.

The response was good, and substantial donations began at once to reach Geneva.¹ But before long the problem had assumed such proportions that the United Nations Mediator himself decided to bring it before the United Nations.

The Stockholm Conference meanwhile also discussed the matter. At the time (August 1948), the number of refugees was put at some 404,000, as follows:

¹ See *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, July 1948, p. 463; August 1948, p. 561.

Ramallah.	125,000
Nablus	50,000
Gaza.	80,000
Nazareth	17,000
Lebanon	60,000
Syria.	60,000
Egypt	12,000

404,000

To give effect to the recommendations made by the Conference, the ICRC and the League established a distribution scheme which was to be synchronised with the general plan drawn up by Count Bernadotte. The ICRC was to continue its already widespread activities for civilians in Palestine and take responsibility for the issue of Red Cross relief in this area. The League, acting in the name of sixty-six National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, was to co-ordinate Red Cross relief to areas outside the fighting zones and to places where National Societies were already operating.

Count Bernadotte, after presiding over the Stockholm Conference in his capacity as Chairman of the Swedish Red Cross, returned to Palestine as Mediator, and set to work to carry through the relief schemes.

Thereupon occurred the treacherous attack which struck him down.¹ On the day of his assassination, September 17, 1948, he had been to visit the ICRC Delegation in Jerusalem, to discuss the task undertaken by the Red Cross and the United Nations Truce Commission. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Delegation, in Government House. After a most friendly discussion with the ICRC Delegate about matters of common interest, Count Bernadotte invited Dr. Fasel to go with him to the YMCA Hostel, to continue their talk. Three cars left the Security Zone at 5 p.m. : the first had four members of the United Nations staff, Dr. Fasel was alone in the second, and in the third was Count Bernadotte and three of his assistants. On arriving at the limits of the Katamon and Talbieh districts, the two cars bearing the United Nations flag were riddled with bullets, while the

¹ See above, p. 32.

Red Cross car was not touched, though inspected by the assailants.

This tragic event plunged the entire Red Cross into mourning. Bitter as the loss was, however, the work had to be carried on.

By November 1948, the ICRC had distributed slightly more than fifty tons of supplies, valued at 1,150,000 Swiss francs. The distribution was made through the ICRC Delegations and the local Committees, which they had set up in most districts. These bodies were composed of representatives of various local interests, medical practitioners, and in general, those best able to appreciate the situation and guarantee fair distribution. The ICRC also obtained the support of the local health boards and of a number of religious institutions which had hospitals of their own.

In December 1948, the refugee problem was raised before the United Nations Assembly in Paris.

Before the end of October, 1948, Mr. Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the United Nations, sent two representatives to Geneva to discuss relief for Palestine refugees with the ICRC and the League. Mr. Lie intended to propose to the Assembly the appointment of a Director to supervise refugee relief, and to call upon two or three private welfare organisations to take responsibility for the issue of supplies in Palestine itself and in the bordering Arab countries. Mr. Lie wished to know beforehand what would be the attitude of the ICRC to an invitation of this kind. As a result of these preliminary talks, the United Nations Third Commission proposed that the General Assembly should vote a grant of 29,500,000 dollars, to cover relief to some 600,000 Palestine Refugees from December 1, 1948, to August, 31, 1949. The amount was to be contributed by Governments, whether or not members of the United Nations; it was to serve for the purchase of foodstuffs, clothing, blankets, shelters, medicaments, medical stores, and for transport. Some Governments were expected to contribute in kind.

This large-scale plan having been accepted in principle, a first vote of five million dollars was placed at the disposal of the Secretary-General. Mr. Lie then called upon three private welfare organisations : the ICRC, the League of Red Cross Societies, and the American Friends Service Committee, to co-operate in the scheme.

The ICRC's mandate was defined in an agreement made on December 16, 1948, with the Director of UNRPR (United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees), Mr. Stanton Griffis, United States Ambassador in Cairo. Under the agreement, the United Nations were to act in the same way as an ordinary donor to whom the ICRC undertakes to furnish regular reports and accounts. At the same time, the United Nations fully recognised the completely independent and autonomous status of the ICRC, which would organise distributions on its sole responsibility and would in no circumstances be placed in a position of subordination to the United Nations. The ICRC was all the more anxious to make its complete independence clear, in order to safeguard its position as neutral intermediary in the Palestine conflict, and in view especially of its obligations to prisoners of war.

The three agencies entrusted with the distribution of relief to the refugees were each to work in a clearly defined area, whilst their operations would be closely co-ordinated. The ICRC was to cover the regions under the command of the Jewish forces, as well as Central Palestine, from Jenin to Hebron. The American Friends Service Committee would operate in Southern Palestine (Gaza and neighbourhood), and the League would distribute relief in Syria, Irak, Lebanon and Transjordan.

The ICRC relief operations were put under the direction of M. Alfred Escher, who was to be ICRC Commissioner for Relief to Palestine Refugees. For the League, these functions would be filled by M. H.P.J. van Ketwich Verschuur, former Director-General of the Netherlands Red Cross, and for the American Friends Service Committee by Mr. Bell.

After a week's survey in Palestine early in December 1948, M. Escher was in a position to make practical plans. The work had already begun on December 24, when 40,000 blankets were dispatched from Beirut. Early in January, 1949, 450 tons of dates, remaining from the first United Nations relief scheme, were shipped likewise from Beirut.

The ICRC had two main operational bases, one in Beirut for relief to Arab Palestine, the other at Haifa for territories under Jewish command. The working teams would include doctors and nurses; their aim would be to ensure regular distribution of

foodstuffs and clothing, and to supervise health conditions of refugees scattered in the towns, or living in separate camps. Teams would operate at Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron and Nazareth.

The ICRC which, from January 1948, had been dealing with the problems arising from the Palestine conflict, and had sent representatives to collect information and to give practical assistance, was gratified to be now enabled, as a result of the United Nations decisions, to assist in relieving the distress of the refugees — the chief victims of the conflict — whilst at the same time continuing its customary work of aid to prisoners of war.
