

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1950)

Rubrik: Korea

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 27.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

December, just after the airstrip had been occupied by Indonesian forces. It proved impossible to make contact with the Southern Molucca forces, although the Delegates penetrated far forward into the fighting zone. A distribution committee was accordingly set up under their control, to issue supplies according to plans they had approved.

On December 16, the aircraft was back in Geneva, after covering over 25,000 miles in 28 days—a feat which, given the bad weather, landing difficulties and the small size of the machine, could scarcely have been thought possible when it set out. A tribute must be paid here to the Air France crew, whose services were beyond praise, and who came to make the success of the mission a point of personal honour.

On first going to Amboina, the boat taking the Delegate and several representatives of the Indonesian Red Cross was displaying Red Cross markings. As a commercial cargo was put on board, the Delegate insisted that the Red Cross markings should be removed. The Indonesian authorities showed their respect for the rules governing use of the emblem by ordering the cargo to be at once unloaded.

VII. — KOREA

The Committee addressed itself, as soon as news of the outbreak of hostilities arrived, to the two Governments at Pyongyang and Seoul. A first cable on June 26, 1950, offered the Committee's services for humanitarian purposes, and in accordance with its statutes, on strictly neutral and non-political lines.¹ Referring to the Geneva Conventions of 1929 and 1949, the Committee underlined that, in its view, the fact that Korea was not party to these agreements, was no obstacle to the *de facto* application of their humanitarian principles for the benefit of victims of the war. The Committee declared its readiness to send a Delegate to each Government, to examine

¹ Noting that this offer had been interpreted as an attempt at mediation, the Committee emphasized, in a telegram to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and in a Press communiqué, the real nature of its intervention which, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, was purely humanitarian.

the conditions under which the principles of the Conventions could be given practical effect.

The attention of the Ministers for External Affairs at Pyongyang and Seoul was drawn to the fact that the notification to each was identical.¹

M. F. Bieri, Delegate at Hong Kong, proceeded immediately on instructions to South Korea.

Anxious to inform the United Nations Security Council of these first steps, the Committee cabled, on June 26, 1950, the full text of its message to the two Parties to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, asking him to bring it to the attention of all members of the Council. This was done two days later.

Subsequently, the Committee addressed similar communications to the Governments of Australia, Great Britain and the United States, and later, to Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand—all of which had taken military decisions calling for such communication. The National Red Cross Societies in these countries also received copy of the text.

The first reply to these notifications was communicated on July 3, 1950, by M. Bieri, now in South Korea, who had just been assured by the President, M. Syngman Rhee, that the Committee's proposals were accepted.

Replies from several States followed. That of the United Kingdom added that, as far as the humanitarian Conventions were declaratory of accepted principles of International Law, the British Government would consider them as applicable in the existing situation in Korea.

The Committee kept the North Korean Government informed. The latter, in a communication dated July 15, 1950, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, announced its intention of conforming strictly to the principles of the Conventions relative to the treatment of prisoners of war.

¹ As the radio company could not guarantee that its cables would reach North Korea direct, the Committee, as an additional precaution — North Korea having diplomatic representation in Moscow — asked the Soviet Ministry for Foreign Affairs to be kind enough to forward copies of the communications, which were addressed to it for the purpose.

The Committee advised the States concerned, in a new communication of July 7, 1950, that the Central Prisoners of War Agency, set up in 1939 under Articles 77 *et seq.* of the 1929 Prisoner of War Convention, was at their disposal.

As the most direct route to North Korea was by Soviet Russia, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at Moscow was asked to issue a transit visa for M. J. de Reynier, formerly head of the Palestine Delegation, now designated as Delegate to the Pyongyang Government. The Committee also asked for the support of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Moscow, and gave it all necessary details about M. de Reynier's mission.

The North Korean Government was at the same time duly informed of the appointments of M. Bieri and M. de Reynier. The Committee gave full information about their mission, indicating that M. de Reynier was ready to start for North Korea, awaiting only the necessary permit.

An attempt was also made to send a Delegate to North Korea via Chinese territory. Peking was informed on July 12 of the nomination of M. Jean Courvoisier, and a transit visa for him was requested. On August 1, the Committee notified this appointment to the North Korean authorities, pointing out that its Delegate should be able to study as soon as possible with them how he could best do the same work as M. Bieri had begun in South Korea. It was added that the Chinese Government had agreed to consider the request for a transit visa, as soon as the North Korean visa was granted. M. Courvoisier arrived at Tientsin from Hong Kong on August 10, with authorization for a temporary stay in Chinese territory.

Negotiations to obtain visas for M. de Reynier meanwhile continued.

At the end of July, application was made to the Soviet Legation in Berne, proposing that a Delegate should travel to Moscow, to make contact with the North Korean Embassy there. This approach proved fruitless.

In view of the failure of previous attempts and the gravity of the situation, the Committee decided to make, through its President, a formal appeal to the Pyongyang authorities. On August 5, M. Ruegger addressed a personal message to the

Prime Minister, in which he referred to previous communications that had remained without response ; he dwelt on the urgency of applying the 1949 Conventions and the humanitarian principles which the North Korean Government had declared itself ready to observe strictly. Reference was made to the mission confided to M. de Reynier and M. Courvoisier, and an earnest appeal made to the Prime Minister to use his influence to secure the admission of the two Delegates to North Korean territory.

Copies of these documents were addressed to the Soviet and Chinese Foreign Ministries (from whom transit visas had been requested), to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and to the Government of India, which, through its diplomatic representative at Peking, had been good enough to support the applications made in connection with M. Courvoisier to the Chinese Government.

Meanwhile, M. Bieri, who returned to Japan after a short stay in South Korea, made arrangements with the military authorities about the work for prisoners held by the United Nations forces. He made the necessary plans for his offices, the work of camp visiting and the transmission of lists of prisoners, inquiries and messages.

On July 21, 1950, M. Bieri received confirmation of his agrément by the United States Government, and decided to leave for Korea on July 25, to open the Delegation there.

It might have been thought that these arrangements, and the precautions taken to ensure entire impartiality, would have given Delegates the possibility of operating in Korea without hindrance, as they usually can in case of civil disturbance or international conflict. It was unfortunately not so. In spite of attempts in different forms, with the accent always on the urgency of the matter, no Delegate was allowed to enter North Korean territory.¹

It was mentioned, in connection with the Central Prisoners of War Agency in Part I, that lists of North Korean prisoners of war were received regularly and communicated by the Agency

¹ M. de Reynier's mission was accordingly changed to South Korea. As M. Courvoisier could not prolong his stay in China, he went to Hong Kong, and, from there, joined up with the mission in Bengal.

to the North Korean Government. Reciprocity, however, was not obtained. Two lists, containing 110 names of prisoners in North Korean hands, were sent to Geneva, in August and in October ; in spite of continuous requests, none further were received.

In this connection, it may be noted that the Department of Defense at Washington gave the figure of 3,900 American missing, as on September 30, 1950.

The scale on which strategy was conducted, the concentrated bombing, the intensity of political feeling, soon made the conflict one of major proportions. In face of this, the Committee tried its best to bring relief impartially whenever it could, by securing access to prisoner of war camps, and by issuing relief to prisoners and to the civilian population.

If the Committee has been unable to operate on both sides, this is certainly not because it has not tried. Several pages of this Report would be needed to outline the various démarches, direct and indirect, made and repeated. The Committee has informed the Authorities concerned that it was reserving its right to publish the relevant documents.

Camp Visits

The following camps were seen by Delegates in 1950.

<i>Camps</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Strength</i>
South Korea POW Camp No. 100	July 26	245
EUSAK POW Camp No. 1	July 29	34
Unified EUSAK POW CAMP No. 1	Sept. 5	2,252
Inchon POW Transit Stockade	Sept. 30	6,284
MAPO Prison Collecting Centre, Seoul	Oct. 1	842
POW Section, 64th USA Field Hos- pital, Taegu	Oct. 2	80
EUSAK POW Camp No. 1	Oct. 14	37,000
EUSAK POW Camp No. 2	Oct. 15	7,672
Inchon POW Transit Stockade	Nov. 8	32,107
POW Camps, Pyongyang	Nov. 11	22,221
UN POW Camp, Pusan	Nov. 20/23	91,971
Inchon POW Transit Stockade	Nov. 30/Dec. 4	26,704
POW Collecting Centre, Hamhung	Dec. 6	162
UN POW Camp No. 1, Pusan	Dec. 27/28	137,212

Under the practice established in 1939, the Committee transmits Delegates' reports on camp visits to the authorities under whose flag the men have fought, and to those on whom they depend during captivity. The reports were accordingly communicated to the Governments of North and South Korea, of the United States, and to the Secretary-General of United Nations. The reports to North Korea were sent first by cable, and subsequently by letter, via the Embassy in Moscow.

Relief

(1) — *Prisoners of War in South Korea.*

On August 13, M. Bieri asked for funds in order to provide some relief—especially educational and recreational—for prisoners. To the end of 1950, 6,250 US dollars have been given him for this purpose.

(2) — *Prisoners of War in North Korea.*

Individual Parcels. — On October 18, following, *inter alia*, an inquiry from the Australian Red Cross, the Committee asked the Universal Postal Union if parcels as well as correspondence could be sent via the Soviet postal service. On November 23, a reply was received that such postal traffic did not exist between the Soviet Union and North Korea.

Collective Consignments. — On October 26, the American Red Cross informed the Committee that it had 2,000 standard food parcels for American and British prisoners of war in North Korea.

At the same time, the Australian and British Red Cross Societies asked whether collective relief could be sent to North Korea.

On November 6, the question was put by cable to the North Korean Ministry of External Affairs ; no reply was received.

(3) — *Civilians in South Korea.*

As from July, M. Bieri received requests for urgent relief (especially for refugees) from President Syngman Rhee and from the Korean Red Cross. The British Red Cross asked if supplies could be distributed in Korea, and afterwards made available £1,000 for impartial relief.

Various National Societies, including the Australian and Indian Red Cross, and the Red Lion and Sun of Iran, enquired about civilian needs in Korea. They were given the general information supplied by the South Korean Delegation. The Australian Red Cross then sent medical supplies and clothing.

Meanwhile, the United Nations had formed a pool to receive all gifts given for relief to civilians. According to information from its Delegates, the Committee could no longer itself distribute the relief supplied by National Societies and other donors.

M. Ruegger accordingly pointed out to Mr. Trygve Lie, on November 25, that the pooling of relief would prevent the Committee itself from operating independently and impartially, and urged the need for making an exception to the rule laid down by Unified Command. Mr. Lie replied that Unified Command could not make such exception because of the over-taxing of Korean ports by military transport. He hoped that later on the Committee would be able to utilize its supplies in accordance with its practice, and added that the ruling of Unified Command in no way hindered the Committee's work for prisoners of war.

It may be noted that, before this exchange of views took place, supplies from the Indian Red Cross were handed over to the Korean Red Cross.

(4) — *Civilians in North Korea.*

On July 19, the Ministry of External Affairs at Pyongyang was asked about civilian needs in North Korea. The Committee stated its desire to assist impartially wherever the need was most felt, and over the whole of the Korean territory. No reply was received.

Several National Red Cross Societies, including the Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, and Czechoslovak, drew attention to the critical situation, due to bombing, of the North Korean population. The Committee stated its willingness to assist these Societies if they wished to send relief to Korea.

The Hungarian Red Cross (which had already announced that it was dispatching an ambulance) accepted this proposal, and sent the Committee a list of medical equipment and supplies. The Committee, in two consignments, forwarded to the Hungarian Red Cross the relief mentioned. On October 13, the Minister for External Affairs at Pyongyang was informed of the scheme.

The Hungarian Red Cross notified the ICRC in June 1951, that, in spite of its efforts, it had been unable to forward the supplies.¹

¹ See p. 63.

