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Autor: Boissier, Léopold

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PREFACE

This twenty-fifth Annual Report¹ of the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in Geneva in 1863 on the initiative of Henry Dunant, gives an account of its humanitarian activities throughout the world in 1955.

In North Africa, Latin America and Asia, in particular, the International Committee endeavoured to assist, without discrimination, the military and civilian victims of all conflicts, whether in the form of war, revolution or armed risings.

In Europe it did its utmost to alleviate the distress caused by the last World War and its direct consequences.

In order to bring this humane task to a successful conclusion, it continued to make use of the services of that powerful and efficient organ, the Central Prisoners of War Agency, Geneva. More recently, the taking over of the International Tracing Service (Arolsen) reinforced still further the means at its disposal.

As in previous years, the International Committee devoted itself to the development of humanitarian law. It continued its efforts for the dissemination of the Conventions of 1949, and, with the assistance of legal experts, it studied the question of the application of humanitarian principles in the event of internal disturbances, of assistance to political detainees, and of the protection of the civilian population from the dangers of aerial warfare and the use of blind weapons; it continued to uphold the doctrine of the Red Cross, to maintain and expand the humanitarian principles which inspire and promote the

¹ Ever since the first Conference held in Geneva (October 26-29, 1863), and during the first years of its existence, the International Committee, as the founder body of the Red Cross, published at intervals a summary report on its work. On surveying the ground covered so far, it appeared to be expedient, as from 1948, to publish an annual report on the situation and, at the close of each year, to point out the progress achieved in the fight against suffering in its many and varied forms.

work of the Red Cross (Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun) and to make them accessible to men of all latitudes.

An outstanding event of the year 1955 was the change in the Presidency. Tribute has been paid, in various ways, to those who, since the First World War, have assumed the heavy burden of guiding the action of the ICRC : Gustave Ador, Max Huber, Carl Burckhardt, Paul Ruegger ; their example, from which we can learn so much, is a daily encouragement to us to persevere in our efforts to strengthen international fellowship based on social aid.

This survey of the past year clearly shows, also, the logical continuity between the numerous activities of the ICRC.¹ Emanating, so to speak, from one another, and expanding into various connected branches, they are carried on in close co-operation with a great number of institutions working in the same field as the Red Cross. A description of these activities will be found in the following pages.

Léopold BOISSIER,
President of the ICRC

¹ For the sake of brevity the International Committee of the Red Cross will be designated by the initials ICRC.