

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1962)

Rubrik: America

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>

authorities, in particular with the Ministry of External Affairs. After receiving the assurance that he would be able to see and interview without the presence of witnesses all the Arab detainees held in the country, he proceeded to Ramla prison where 103 of the 104 detainees were held ; he also visited the other prisoner who, in view of his youth, was in a separate prison at Damoun.

As is customary, the delegate informed the detention authorities of his observations. He also studied with them the possibility of transmitting relief parcels to the detainees and even of their receiving the benefit of some measures of clemency.

Before leaving Israel, Mr. Pilloud met the leaders of the Magen David Adom, a Society which, although not recognized as such on an international level, because of its emblem, carries out in a remarkable fashion the functions of a National Red Cross. He discussed with them the problems created by the transmission through the ICRC of family messages between Israel and the Arab States.

AMERICA

Cuba

On October 30, U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting with the consent of the USA and the USSR, appealed to the ICRC in Geneva for assistance in the inspection of vessels bound for Cuba. As will be recalled, this request was directly connected with the serious crisis which had just broken out in the Caribbean and which threatened to cause an outbreak of hostilities between the two largest Powers in the world, with the frightful consequences that could have arisen as a result of this crisis due to the presence on Cuban territory of Soviet nuclear weapons described as "offensive" by the USA. The ICRC observed that this task was outside the normal scope of its humanitarian mission, but in view of the danger of a nuclear war, which would have caused immense suffering to humanity, it gave its acceptance, in principle, thus contributing to a work of prevention of war in accordance with the

principles of the Red Cross adopted in 1961. However, it made this acceptance subject to three conditions :

- 1) agreement among the three parties concerned (United States, Soviet Union and Cuba) ;
- 2) agreement, at least implicit, of the maritime Powers concerned ;
- 3) possibility of carrying out a real and effective inspection.

Consequently, through the intermediary of the United Nations, the ICRC ascertained that the Government of Cuba would give its agreement to the inspection envisaged and then made known its readiness to examine the possibility of offering its good offices with a view to the recruitment of personnel to carry out the operation, it being understood that this operation would be performed in conformity with the general principles of the Red Cross and with the provisions of international law. Furthermore, the direct responsibility for control would be incumbent on the United Nations and the States directly involved.

Having thus defined its standpoint in principle, the ICRC delegated its former President, Mr. Paul Ruegger, to New York on a contact and information mission, to both the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the representatives of the States involved. Mr. Ruegger was accompanied by Mr. Melchior Borsinger, Secretary to the Presidency. The good offices which the ICRC planned to offer to the United Nations, at U Thant's request, and in circumstances of an exceptional gravity, were the subject of numerous exchanges of viewpoints which permitted both the United Nations and the three Powers directly involved to appreciate fully the contribution which the Geneva Committee would be able to afford, and it also enabled the ICRC to understand with precision the extent of the assistance requested of it within the terms of reference laid down. In addition, in order that this mission would be justified in the eyes of the ICRC, it was necessary to ascertain that it could be carried out in an efficient manner, that it would be effective and that there was indeed a grave and immediate threat of nuclear war. However, on November 23, the Secretary-General of the United Nations was able to write as follows to Mr. Léopold Boissier,

President of the ICRC, after having thanked him for Mr. Ruegger's mission to New York : " It seems to me, however, that, with the lifting of the quarantine imposed by the USA, which was announced by the President of the United States last Tuesday, the question of calling upon the good offices of the ICRC in connection with the Cuban crisis, as originally envisaged, is no longer necessary." This view was shared by the ICRC, and the preparatory work was stopped. Nevertheless, the United Nations' request to the ICRC had aroused considerable interest throughout the world and bore witness to the deep feelings of attachment of international opinion towards the Red Cross and the ICRC .

The following is the text of the circular-letter which the ICRC sent, on November 15, 1962, to all the National Societies of the Red Cross concerning this incident :

The events of Cuba have drawn the attention of world public opinion. We therefore think it our duty to inform you of the rôle which the United Nations have asked the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to assume, in order to contribute towards a peaceful settlement of that question.

As the ICRC explained in its two press commüniqués of November 5 and 13, U Thant, Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations, requested the eventual help of the ICRC in the control of vessels proceeding to Cuba. By the terms of this proposal, the ICRC would appoint a team of some thirty inspectors from outside the institution which would be put at the disposal of the United Nations and placed under their authority. These inspectors would assure, for a limited period, that cargoes did not contain certain categories of weapons.

The ICRC replied that it could consider, as an absolutely exceptional measure, lending its good offices to the United Nations. It imposed, however, two prior conditions on its acceptance in principle, namely that the three Powers directly concerned agree to the action requested of it and that this should conform to Red Cross principles.

The ICRC did not take this decision without considerable reflexion, since such a task is outside the conventional and traditional scope of its humanitarian mission. Several important reasons, however, led it not to immediately reject the proposal which had been submitted to it.

First of all, an appeal was being made to the ICRC as the only international body able, in circumstances of extreme gravity, to fulfil a mandate judged to be capable of maintaining peace in the world. Now, there had been every reason to fear, for several days at least, that a conflict breaking out under such conditions would rapidly assume the character of an atomic war, which would not have failed to cause the loss of countless lives and inflict vast suffering on many other people. Even more, the Red Cross itself at the same time risked seeing its work everywhere destroyed or rendered impossible.

The declaration of Red Cross principles recently adopted in Prague by the Council of Delegates assigns to the Red Cross the duty to "prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found" and to promote "co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples". There was a time in the history of the Red Cross when it was thought that giving assistance to prisoners of war, or relief work in time of peace, were outside its field of activity. Gradually, during the course of a long period of evolution, the Red Cross has now extended its scope to include suffering in nearly all its forms.

It could be feared that the Red Cross might venture into the sphere of international politics. However, it is precisely by reason of its neutrality and independence towards all States that the ICRC was considered, not to accomplish an act of a political order, but on the contrary to exercise, in a given situation, its functions of a non-political institution. Moreover, whenever it fights against the evils engendered by conflicts, whenever it endeavours to set limits to the recourse to employing certain methods of combat, the ICRC intervenes, to some extent, on a State level, in order to make a duty of humanity prevail, on each occasion on which the importance of the interests involved demand it. In insisting, as a prior condition to any action on its part, on the express agreement of the three States directly concerned, the ICRC esteems that it has, in advance, "depolitized", the mission which would be entrusted to it, in circumstances which, one must emphasize, could lead to a general war.

The ICRC will continue to follow closely the way in which this question will evolve. It is by no means certain that, ultimately, it will be called upon to give its effective help. At all events, it will keep the world of the Red Cross informed of further developments in this matter.

Irrespective of the Cuban crisis, the ICRC renewed its efforts in the course of the year to resume contact on the spot with the Cuban Red Cross and to perform its specific tasks for the benefit of civil and military prisoners. However, as in previous years, these efforts have so far led to no result.

The Puerto Rico Conference

Two ICRC observers, Mr. Pierre Jequier, Delegate on mission to Latin America, and Mr. Henri Coursier, adviser in the legal department, attended the VIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference, held in San Juan de Puerto Rico from November 4 to 10. At a plenary session they presented a report on the application of the Geneva Conventions in non-international conflicts. This was of great interest to the National Red Cross representatives, certain of whom had already had occasion to carry out their functions in collaboration with the ICRC in the course of local disturbances. During the last session the meeting unanimously adopted two motions expressing the Conference's sympathy with and support for the ICRC, which was at that time being requested by the United Nations to undertake, in connection with the Cuban crisis, a difficult mission for the maintenance of peace.

After the Conference at Puerto Rico, Mr. Coursier went to the United States, at the request of the American Red Cross, in order to describe to numerous personalities and several important Chapters of the American Red Cross (San Francisco, Denver, St. Louis and Washington) the present-day activities of the ICRC within the framework of the Geneva Conventions.

EUROPE

Compensation to Victims of Pseudo-medical Experiments

At the request of the Government of the German Federal Republic, the ICRC, in 1961, agreed to undertake the mission of