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The Democratic Republic of Vietnam released three American pilots in February and three others in August.

Relief Supplies.—Following the appeal of 9 February, the ICRC, in agreement with National Societies, decided to allocate 25% of the relief supplies received to the Democratic Republic.

As a result, and after contacting the Red Cross of North Vietnam in March, the ICRC delegates in Phnom-Penh sent to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam the share which had been allocated to it.

On 25 July, the ICRC sent a 76-ton consignment to the Democratic Republic by rail via Moscow to Vladivostok and from there by sea to Haiphong. This consignment included medical supplies, a 120-bed mobile hospital equipped with surgical instruments, a water-conditioning plant and a pre-fabricated "Telescopic-House" unit equipped as an X-ray theatre. The National Societies of Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as the Belgian and Austrian Governments, Oxfam, Christian Aid and the World Council of Churches, contributed to this operation.

III. NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

The National Liberation Front, in 1968, continued to avoid contact with the ICRC which unsuccessfully repeated its attempts to obtain news of civilians and enemy military personnel reported missing and presumed to be held prisoner by the NLF.

4. MIDDLE EAST

The Conflict between Israel and the Arab Countries

GENERAL REMARKS

Apart from the repatriation of prisoners of war between Israel and the Arab countries, the main problem which faced the ICRC in 1968 was the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the

occupied territories of the Golan plateau, the west bank of the Jordan and Gaza-Sinai.

To carry out its various tasks over the year, the ICRC had some fifteen permanent delegates in the various States directly affected by the conflict, namely the United Arab Republic, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel, and the Israeli-occupied territories.

I. REPATRIATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR

In 1967, various agreements on the exchange of prisoners of war were concluded, through the intermediary of the ICRC, by Israel and the Arab countries. Repatriation operations also took place in 1968, particularly to the United Arab Republic and to Jordan.

a) Israel and the United Arab Republic.—In January, these two countries started repatriation of prisoners of war taken during the June 1967 conflict. Some 4,300 servicemen were repatriated and the operation was organized and supervised by ICRC delegates. At the same time, 37 Egyptian civilian detainees were also repatriated.

b) Israel and Jordan.—Following the incidents at Karameh (East of the Jordan) on 21 March, the Israeli forces captured a number of Jordanian combatants. These included 12 members of the Jordanian regular army and 147 members of the Palestine resistance organization. Negotiations were undertaken by the ICRC for the latter to be given treatment identical to that to which prisoners of war are entitled.

The 12 Jordanian soldiers were transferred to Jordan territory on 28 March. The resistance fighters were interned in prisons at Jericho and Jenin; 81 of them were repatriated a few months later.

In August, the Israeli Government wrote the ICRC officially stating that it held no more prisoners of war.

II. CIVILIAN POPULATIONS

1. Application of the IVth Convention.—In spite of ICRC efforts, the Israeli Government stated that it wished to leave the question

of the application of the IVth Convention in Israeli-occupied territory " open for the moment ", preferring to act on a pragmatic basis and to grant delegates practical facilities.

The Geneva Conventions being treaties concluded by States, responsibility for their strict implementation lies with the signatory governments. The ICRC, which has received no application either from the Powers whose territory has been occupied or from the occupying Power to act as the Protecting Power, is endeavouring to carry out its humanitarian activities to the extent permitted by the practical facilities granted by the Israeli Government.

2. Transfers of Persons and Reuniting of Families.—a) *West of the Jordan*—As only 14,058 persons were able to return west of the Jordan during the operation for the return of refugees in August 1967, it was necessary to make new arrangements for the reuniting of families on both sides of the Jordan. The new system began operating efficiently towards the end of 1967.

However, following a border clash on the Allenby Bridge on 21 January 1968, in which two ICRC delegates were seriously wounded, these family reuniting operations were suspended. Before continuing this activity, the ICRC insisted on measures being taken and officially notified, by both Governments, for the safety both of the Arab families and the delegates.

The Israeli authorities, having been unable to accept the security measures suggested by the ICRC, made new plans for the reuniting of families: negotiations would henceforth be undertaken by the mayors of the occupied Arab areas who would themselves go to Amman to fetch persons authorized to return.

Repatriation operations were then resumed, the ICRC intervening only to bring to the attention of the Israeli authorities urgent cases of distress, due for instance to age or ill health.

By the end of the year, according to the Israeli authorities, nearly 9,000 permits to return to the west bank of the Jordan had been granted, and 5,750 persons had actually rejoined their families.

b) *United Arab Republic and Gaza-Sinai*—The programme drawn up by the ICRC for the two-way reuniting of families from and to the United Arab Republic and the occupied territories of

Gaza-Sinai enabled some 4,000 people, originally from the Nile Valley or from Gaza, to join their families either west of the Suez Canal or in the Gaza area.

These transfer operations took place at El Qantara, with some 350 people a month returning to their homes.

c) *Syria*—Following the ICRC's persistence, the military authorities at Kuneitra agreed in September to transmit to the Israeli Government 739 applications from persons wishing to join their families on the Golan Plateau.

In the meantime, in order to reduce the hardship caused by total lack of contact between family members, ICRC delegates in Damascus and Kuneitra stepped up their personal visits to transmit news orally.

d) *Lebanon*—The ICRC delegation in the Lebanon frequently had to arrange repatriation to or from Israel of persons who crossed the border inadvertently.

3. Expulsions.—In March and June, the Israeli forces expelled several scores of Arab inhabitants of Kuneitra, who went towards Damascus. Similarly, a number of Arabs living on the west bank of the Jordan were expelled to the other bank.

The ICRC protested strongly to the Israeli authorities against these expulsions which are contrary to the provisions of the IVth Geneva Convention.

4. Destruction of buildings.—During the year, the Israeli military forces have on several occasions, by way of reprisals for the activities of resistance fighters, destroyed houses in the occupied territories of Gaza and the west bank of the Jordan.

The ICRC delegates in Israel repeatedly petitioned the Israeli civilian and military authorities to cease these practices which are contrary to articles 33 and 53 of the IVth Convention, and to ask for the reconstruction of the damaged houses or for financial compensation to be paid.

At the end of the year, the President of the ICRC wrote the Israeli Government expressing concern at this destruction which is contrary to the IVth Convention. He drew the authorities'

attention to the difficult plight of the refugees who, from one day to another, found themselves deprived of their homes.

5. Tracing of Missing Military Personnel.—At the beginning of 1968, the ICRC asked the Israeli authorities for permission to conduct enquiries into the fate of thousands of Egyptian soldiers missing in Sinai after the fighting in June 1967.

These enquiries, carried out in three phases, with delegates going first to the North, then to the South and finally to the centre of Sinai, were unfortunately unsuccessful. However, they did permit a number of interesting observations concerning the application of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, particularly as regards the medical situation and food supply in the regions inspected.

6. Hardship Relief.—a) *West of the Jordan.*—On 17th October 1967, the ICRC and the League jointly launched an appeal for assistance to the Middle East.

In January 1968, the Jerusalem delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross received the relief supplies intended for people in need on the west bank of the Jordan. In accordance with a programme worked out with the occupation authorities and the eight local branches of the Red Crescent Society, they distributed 40 tons of milk powder in 35 towns and villages. More than 17,000 children under 12 receive 500 grams of milk a month.

In December, the ICRC, with the co-operation of the Israeli Social Welfare organization, distributed 5,000 blankets and several thousand items of clothing among various charitable institutions on the west bank of the Jordan.

b) *Gaza-Sinai.*—ICRC representatives on several occasions applied to the Israeli authorities for permission to distribute food-stuffs provided by the United Arab Republic Red Crescent. As a result, in April 75 tons of food, and in September 300 tons, were distributed to the needy in the North of Sinai.

Apart from these supplies from Egypt, the ICRC distributed 10 tons of milk at El Qantara and El Arish, and 300 tarpaulins for tents in Sinai. At El Arish the ICRC works in close co-operation

with the local branch of the Red Crescent which was reconstituted in March 1968.

c) *Syria*.—With the approach of winter, the ICRC sent the Syrian Red Crescent 50 tons of food (milk and cheese) and 4,000 blankets, as a measure of assistance to the 100,000 displaced persons living in camps near Damascus.

d) *United Arab Republic*.—In January 1968, fifty tons of second-hand clothing as well as medical supplies provided by the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany were delivered by the ICRC to the Egyptian Red Crescent and other relief organisations, for the benefit of Palestine refugees living in the Nile Valley.

7. Medical Assistance.—Throughout last year, ICRC delegates continued visiting hospitals, particularly on the west bank of the Jordan and in Gaza.

At the end of November, the Committee decided to send to each of these two territories a doctor-delegate to make an assessment of the medical and food situation.

8. Visits to Detainees.—In 1968 the ICRC delegates were authorized by the Israeli government to visit some of the Arab civilians interned in Israel and the occupied territories. They thereupon went to ten prisons (3 in Israel, 6 on the west bank of the Jordan and 1 in Gaza) where nearly 2,000 Arabs were detained. During this action they endeavoured to see as many detainees as possible. However, the delegates did not received authorization to visit Arab detainees from East Jerusalem.

III. JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES

The ICRC also continued its action in 1968 for the benefit of Jewish communities, stateless or national, in some of the Arab countries. It was concerned particularly at the plight of some 230 detained Jewish Egyptians and stateless civilians in Cairo. In spite of his repeated applications, the ICRC delegate was not allowed to visit them. On the other hand, he was able to forward family

messages between the prisoners and their relatives abroad; he was also able to send them parcels and medicaments.

In Syria, the ICRC maintained contact with the three Jewish communities in Damascus, Aleppo and Kamichlie, consisting entirely of Syrian nationals.

5. ARABIAN PENINSULA

North Yemen

In 1968, ICRC action, in this part of the Yemen under Royalist control, was mainly medical assistance to the wounded and the sick. This was because, in December 1967, the resumption of hostilities between Royalist and Republic forces in the southern part of the Jauf desert brought in its wake a sudden increase in the number of wounded. As most of them could not be moved, the ICRC sent a medical team to Jihanah near the areas where fighting was going on.

In view of the extent of the needs reported by its delegates, the ICRC decided in January 1968 to step up its action on Royalist territory by establishing a small surgical unit near the front. However, changes in the military situation and technical difficulties were to stand in the way of this project.

On March 21, the Jihanah medical post was bombed for the first time. There were no ICRC personnel among the casualties, but two Yemeni guards were seriously wounded. In addition, the stock of medicaments, foodstuffs and fuel was completely destroyed.

In April, the medical team split into two groups and started a second field post with the intention of converting a cave into an operating theatre. The scheme had to be abandoned as the site chosen was bombed on May 21.

At the end of June the medical personnel could not be relieved as the country between the Najran base and Jihanah was temporarily in the hands of dissident tribes. The two surgeons and one of the male nurses in the relief team were then transferred to Aden where they took over from the ICRC surgical team then working in that