

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1975)

Rubrik: Latin America

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Ethiopia

The events in Eritrea

At the beginning of 1975, the ICRC planned to send a joint ICRC-Ethiopian Red Cross medical team to Eritrea to help the population and visit the prisons of the area where sporadic outbreaks of violence were occurring. A 230-ton shipment of flour, a gift from the Swiss Confederation, was on the way to Massawa, where it was expected to arrive by the end of January.

As soon as the ICRC regional delegate for East Africa, accompanied by a medical delegate, arrived in Asmara around 20 January, he set about preparing this relief campaign in collaboration with the Ethiopian Red Cross and with the agreement of the national authorities when, on the evening of 31 January, the fighting broke out. At that precise moment, the two ICRC delegates were only a few hours away from Asmara on their way back to Addis Ababa.

The following day they pleaded with the authorities to be allowed to return, but in vain. In any case both land and air routes remained cut for several weeks.

The offer that the two delegates in Addis Ababa had made to the authorities was officially reiterated on 9 February in a telegram bearing the signature of the President of the ICRC Executive Board and addressed to Brigadier-General Tefferi Bante, President of the Provisional Military Administrative Council. The offer was based on article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions concerning the protection of victims in armed conflicts not of an international character.

During the following weeks many approaches were made in Addis Ababa, especially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On May 6, the ICRC sent another note to Brigadier-General Tefferi Bante again offering to collaborate with the Ethiopian Red Cross to protect and help the victims of the clashes, but still in vain.

As the ICRC could operate, from Addis Ababa, only with the agreement of the national authorities, it was not possible to send aid to Eritrea from Ethiopian territory.

However, through the representatives of the Eritrean liberation movements who, for their part, had asked the ICRC to help, it was possible to send some consignments of medical supplies into Eritrea.

Something else drew the attention of the ICRC to Eritrea during the closing months of the year. The combatants of the liberation movements, *Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)* and *People's Liberation Front (PLF)*, had taken as hostages:

- two American employees from the Kagnev Base (taken by the ELF),
- two other employees from the same base (PLF),
- two British subjects of Chinese origin (PLF), and
- the British Honorary Consul at Asmara (PLF).

With the representatives of the liberation movements outside Ethiopia arrangements were made for an exchange of correspondence between the captives and their families and for relief supplies to be sent to them.

Western Sahara

Just before Christmas, 1975, an ICRC mission consisting of a delegate and a medical delegate made an on-the-spot survey of the humanitarian needs arising from the events in the Western Sahara.

The decision to send the delegation arose from press reports about developments in the area and was also in response to an invitation from the *Polisario Front* to visit Moroccan prisoners who were in their hands.

Between 17 and 23 December, the two ICRC representatives visited Sahraoui refugees in Algeria and also saw displaced persons in the Western Sahara.

Their observations and the information they received, together with the results of missions carried out at about the same time in Algeria by delegates of the League of Red Cross Societies and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, made it possible to estimate the needs of several tens of thousands of Sahraouis—refugees in Algeria or displaced in the Western Sahara. The situation of these people with regard to food and medical care was especially serious and was greatly aggravated by the bad climatic conditions.

This assessment of the deeply disturbing situation served as the basis, at the beginning of 1976, of a joint appeal by the League and the ICRC to finance a programme of assistance both to the Sahraoui refugees in Algeria—carried out by the League—and to those displaced in the Western Sahara—carried out by the ICRC.

During their mission, the ICRC representatives, pursuant to the agreement by the *Polisario Front* to respect the Geneva Conventions, visited eight Moroccan nationals held by this group and four Mauritanian policemen who had been captured a few days before the visit. In conformity with the Convention, the interviews took place without witnesses.

The ICRC has regularly informed the Spanish Red Cross, the Moroccan and Mauritanian Red Crescent Societies, and the Spanish, Moroccan and Mauritanian authorities, of its activities and proposals. Its delegates have had the full co-operation of the Algerian Red Crescent, which has been active in helping Sahraoui refugees in Algeria.

LATIN AMERICA

Chile

In 1975, the ICRC continued the protection and assistance activities carried out since the events of 11 September 1973.

It was however necessary to adapt these activities to the evolution of the situation within Chile, which had resulted in a drop in the number of detainees, and to the finance made available to the ICRC. As a result, the size of the delegation was progressively reduced so that, by the end of December, there

were only 15 persons left (6 delegates, one of them a doctor, and nine locally employed staff), which was half as many as there had been at the beginning of the year.

Visiting places of detention

The delegates continued visiting camps where *detainees were being held under the state of emergency regulations*, and the country's civil prisons. They also visited several military detention centres.

It should be made quite clear that the ICRC was not allowed to visit the interrogation centres belonging to the security services, with but one exception. Although the delegates were authorised to speak to prisoners without witnesses in the camps and civilian prisons, they were not generally granted the same facility elsewhere.

Between January and December, the delegates made a total of 257 visits to 96 places of detention housing between 3,400 and 4,000 detainees. The latter figure includes *detainees being held under emergency regulations, indicted prisoners (procesados) and convicted prisoners*.

As is the custom, a report was drawn up after each visit and was addressed to the competent authorities. Steps were taken to improve the detention conditions observed in certain of the places visited by the ICRC. The delegates intervened on behalf of those whose situation required that immediate steps be taken and they also dealt with various problems relating to the detainees' legal situation.

As in 1974, the ICRC noted the wishes of persons affected by the Government's programme for liberating certain "detainees being held under emergency regulations" on condition that they agreed to leave the country. In respect of the parallel programme concerning the "convicted detainees" which began in the spring of 1975, the only action that the ICRC took was to inform the detainees that the programme existed. There was little point in ascertaining their wishes as it was up to the detainees themselves to request their release and banishment.

Assistance to detainees and to their families

Throughout 1975, the ICRC continued its relief work in places of detention but on a lesser scale than in 1974. In all, the delegates provided detainees directly with more than 125,000 Swiss francs worth of relief supplies.

The ICRC also continued to help the families of detainees by providing them with some food and clothing. In some cases, it also assumed medical expenses. During the first six months, it helped more than 3,000 families, or about 15,000 persons. During the second six months, the programme was progressively reduced to bring it into line with available financial resources and, as a result, the number of families helped had to be limited to 2,000, or about 10,000 persons. Of the fifty distribution centres spread around the country and administered by the local sections of the Chilean Red Cross or some other organisation, 47 were kept open.

The delegation made considerable on-the-spot purchases of foodstuffs for distribution. This was supplemented by the gifts in kind received from several National Societies:

- Hungarian Red Cross: 2,656 kg of clothing and canned meat;
- Argentine Red Cross: 409 kg of food and clothing;
- Romanian Red Cross: 5,750 kg of canned meat;
- German Democratic Republic Red Cross: 4,288 kg of clothing and blankets and 16,500 kg of baby food;
- Finnish Red Cross: 10,120 kg of powdered skimmed milk;
- Czech Red Cross: 1,068 kg of blankets, plus some medicaments;
- Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR: 11,661 kg of food, clothing and medical supplies;
- Polish Red Cross: 1,769 kg of blankets;
- Australian Red Cross: 739 kg of medicaments.

Goods (powdered milk, medical supplies, blankets and clothes) to a value of just over 30,000 Swiss francs were allocated by the ICRC to various organisations, including the Chilean Red Cross.

In addition, the EEC and the Swiss Confederation provided food to a total value of 1.125 million Swiss francs (see table on p. 27).

Over the whole year, aid to the families of detainees totalled an outlay of 1,336,000 Swiss francs.

Central Tracing Agency

The handling of information by the Santiago office of the Central Tracing Agency (see p. 32) was simplified by offloading more of its work onto the central office in Geneva, thereby leaving it free to concentrate on meeting short-term needs.

Contacts made by the delegation

As part of its activities, the delegation kept in close touch with the authorities and with other organisations associated with its relief work. These organisations included the *Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM)*, the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR)*, the "*Comisión de Ayuda a los Extranjeros (CALEX)*", the "*Fundación de Ayuda Social a las Iglesias Cristianas (FASIC)*", the *Churches, Caritas* and, of course, the *Chilean Red Cross*.

Financial situation

In 1975, the Chilean relief campaign had available a total of 1.75 million Swiss francs, made up of the balance brought forward from 1974 (Sfr. 592,000), new contributions (Sfr. 1,086,000) (see table on p. 56) and a special allocation for the current campaign (Sfr. 77,500). As expenditure over the year totalled Sfr. 1,683,700, the year closed with an available balance of about Sfr. 72,000.