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of State, President Moktar Ould Daddah. All the missions had the same purpose: to discuss with the authorities and the Mauritanian Red Crescent the whole spectrum of humanitarian problems arising out of the conflict in the Western Sahara, to obtain the list of Polisario combatants in the hands of the Mauritians, and to obtain permission to visit them.

In January 1977, the ICRC representatives were able to make a further visit — the first having taken place in January 1976 — to 126 Polisario fighters captured by the Mauritanian armed forces. However, they were not allowed to talk to the prisoners without witnesses, and they were not given a list of names.

No other visit to prisoners took place later, since the Mauritanian authorities considered that Algeria was responsible for the situation and should grant the ICRC permission to exercise protective action in favour of all the Mauritanian troops captured in battle.

### **Prisoners in the hands of the Polisario Front**

From the beginning of the year, through missions which visited Algeria in January and March and through approaches made from Geneva to the Sahrawi and Algerian authorities, the ICRC reiterated its request to be given the lists of names of Mauritanian and Moroccan soldiers captured by the Polisario Front and to have access to all of them.

Following the attack on May 1 against Zouerate (Mauritania) and the disappearance on that occasion of ten persons (six French and four Mauritanian), the ICRC, at the request of the families concerned, the French Red Cross and the Mauritanian Red Crescent, made approaches through the Algerian Red Crescent to the "Sahrawi Red Crescent", in order to obtain news of the missing persons.

On May 13, the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a message to the President of the ICRC in which, while affirming that Algeria was in no way responsible for the military operations in the Western Sahara, and in particular at Zouerate, he stated that his Government was completely willing to help establish direct contact with representatives of the Polisario Front.

On receiving this message, the ICRC President replied, proposing that an ICRC envoy should go to Algiers for top-level discussion of all the existing humanitarian problems. However, the Algerian authorities thought that the moment for such talks had not come, and persisted in this view, so that by the end of 1977 the proposed mission had still not taken place.

In the meantime, military and political tension had increased, and on 25 October fifteen Mauritians and two French nationals were captured in the region of Zouerate.

Again the ICRC took steps, and at the end of November another mission made a further attempt to visit all the prisoners

— Mauritanian, Moroccan and French — in the hands of the Polisario Front; but without success, since the Front's representatives made the visits conditional on reciprocal concessions for its combatants held in Morocco and in Mauritania.

Finally, without the ICRC having obtained confirmation of their capture, the eight French nationals were freed and handed over by the Polisario Front to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 23 December 1977.

### **Morocco**

In addition to the messages sent from Geneva, various missions visited Rabat, in January, April and December 1977. The purpose of these was to visit once more the 99 Algerian soldiers held prisoner in Rabat, and to obtain lists of names and access to any combatants of the Polisario Front captured by the Moroccan armed forces.

In reply to a letter from the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, the President of the ICRC, writing on 20 July 1977, stressed the anxiety felt by the ICRC, confronted as it was by difficulties in carrying out its mission of protection and assistance in favour of all the victims of events in the Sahara. He proposed that an ICRC representative should travel to Rabat to discuss the problems.

It was not until December 1977 that another visit could be made to the 99 Algerian military prisoners. Through the Moroccan Red Crescent the ICRC had also been able to transfer the sum of 14,500 Swiss francs made available for these prisoners by the Algerian Red Crescent. With regard to the combatants of the Polisario Front in Moroccan hands, however, the efforts made throughout the year by the ICRC did not result in any progress.

## **Conflict in the Ogaden**

Deeply concerned by the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict in the Ogaden region, causing a growing number of civilian and military victims, the ICRC made an appeal at the beginning of August to all the parties involved, urging them to respect the rules of humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts and to see that those rules were observed by their combatants.

In the appeal, the ICRC also offered its services to make visits to all the prisoners of war captured by the parties to the conflict (in conformity with Article 126 of the Third Geneva Convention) and to provide the prisoners with protection and assistance.

The International Committee likewise offered to supply material and medical aid to the civilian population affected by the events.

Simultaneously with the appeal, the ICRC ordered one of its two regional delegates based in Nairobi to proceed to Ethiopia, and the other to Somalia.

The regional delegate sent to Addis Ababa stayed there from 2 to 15 August, his mission being to remind the Ethiopian authorities of their obligations under the Geneva Conventions and to offer the services of the ICRC in favour of the civilian and military victims of the conflict. The regional delegate had talks with the First Vice-President of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (DERG) and the Minister of Defence.

The Ethiopian authorities regarded the Ogaden conflict as an international armed conflict, and therefore considered that the Geneva Conventions were applicable. For this reason they accepted the offer of the ICRC's services and gave their consent in principle for the delegates to visit prisoners of war in their hands and to organize relief for the civilian victims.

During this first mission, the regional delegate also had contacts with the Ethiopian Red Cross, the "Relief and Rehabilitation Commission" (RRC) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

A similar mission was carried out in Mogadishu, between 4 and 11 August, by the other regional delegate.

The Somali Government did not consider that it was a party to the conflict and refused to discuss with the ICRC the humanitarian questions involved. Nevertheless, the Government agreed to the International Committee's acting in collaboration with the Somali Red Crescent.

Faced with these divergent political attitudes, the ICRC pointed out that, in the conflict in the Ogaden, as in any other, its objectives were purely humanitarian. In fact, it is not for the ICRC to judge the legitimate or representative character of parties to a conflict.

Concerned only for the welfare of the victims, the ICRC again sent one delegate to Addis Ababa and another to Mogadishu, to assess the extent of the needs, so that care could be provided for the wounded and help for the tens of thousands of persons driven from their homes by the fighting.

### ICRC appeals for funds

After these exploratory missions by its delegates, the International Committee on 9 September sent out an appeal to governments, National Societies and specialized international agencies asking for material and financial support for its emergency action to help the civilian and military victims of the Ogaden war.

Owing to the political attitudes adopted by the parties involved the operation intended to provide protection and assistance

could not be carried out as well as the ICRC delegates' first missions had indicated and as the needs of the victims required.

In view of the difficulties encountered, the delegate general for Africa visited Ethiopia and Somalia between 9 and 30 October, in the hope of clarifying the situation and for the purpose of reminding the parties that the ICRC had in mind only the interests of the civilian and military victims of the conflict.

### Medical assistance

To assess the needs of the victims for medical aid and material relief, the ICRC sent a team of experts to each side of the front line in September.

In *Ethiopia*, a doctor and a relief delegate, accompanied by the General Secretary of the Ethiopian Red Cross and a member of the RRC, visited various localities along the road linking Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Harar.

According to their estimate, about 53,000 persons had been displaced by the fighting in this region and in the provinces of Bale and Sidamo, and were in need of aid (blankets, tents, basic foodstuffs). In addition, the hospitals in the towns of Dire Dawa, Harar and Jijiga required supplies of medicines and medical supplies.

In *Somalia*, a doctor-delegate of the ICRC, accompanied by the delegate of the League of Red Cross Societies based in Mogadishu and by the General Secretary of the Somali Red Crescent, visited the region of Hargeisa.

As in Ethiopia, the persons displaced by the fighting — about 10,000, most of them women, children and old people — needed blankets and food. The hospitals visited were full to overflowing with wounded and were short of medicines.

### Logistic problems

Having realized how urgent the needs were, the ICRC, before dispatching any relief supplies, made efforts to find a way of ensuring that they would arrive quickly and in good condition. This was one of the tasks performed by the relief delegate in Ethiopia. It was not possible to send supplies rapidly by boat; it was therefore decided to send them by charter flights. Two consignments consisting of 6 tons of relief supplies (tents, blankets, medical supplies) were flown to Addis Ababa from Nairobi.

There remained the problem of redirecting the relief to the areas affected by the fighting. Since, for security reasons, the Ethiopian Government was unable to authorize the ICRC delegates to travel to those areas to distribute the relief supplies, the

forwarding of the supplies and their distribution were carried out by the Ethiopian Red Cross and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

For the displaced persons on the other side of the fighting line, two consignments were taken in by air from Nairobi during September: 6 tons of relief supplies, comprising tents, blankets and medical supplies.

As the needs of the victims increased, the ICRC found it necessary to make plans to send relief to the Ogaden by truck from Nairobi, via Somalia. A relief delegate was sent to Nairobi to co-ordinate the operation.

However, as a result of a decision by the Kenyan authorities, a convoy carrying food supplies was held up at the border between Kenya and Somalia, and the ICRC was forced to rethink its methods of sending relief to the Ogaden. It decided to do so by direct charter flights from Geneva to Mogadishu. The Somali Red Crescent undertook to forward the supplies to the combat zone, where the regional delegate and a doctor delegate helped in the distribution.

### Relief statistics

Since the beginning of its relief operations for the victims of the conflict in the Ogaden, the ICRC has sent 258 tons of relief supplies (44 tons of medicines and medical supplies, 212 tons of food, tents and blankets and 2 tons of soap), to a total value of 1,757,100 Swiss francs.

These figures do not include the consignments of food sent by the Swiss Confederation, listed on page 32 of the present report.

### Protection

*ETHIOPIA.* — In the course of the discussions with the First Vice-President of the DERG, the regional delegate asked to be given a list of prisoners in Ethiopian hands and permission to visit them.

In addition, he expressed the wish for the prisoners to be relocated in the capital, in a single place of detention, to facilitate the visits, since the combat zones were prohibited to non-military personnel for security reasons.

The first two items in his request were granted, and on 2 August the regional delegate visited two prisoners in hospital in Dire Dawa and another held in Addis Ababa.

When the delegate general for Africa visited Ethiopia during his mission in October, the authorities handed him a list of 161 persons reported missing. The ICRC transmitted the list to the opposing party.

*SOMALIA.* — In October the ICRC regional delegate was in Mogadishu and visited 150 persons (a list of whose names had

been supplied to him) held in the Geladi centre in the Ogaden. Family messages written by the prisoners were sent to Addis Ababa for distribution by the Ethiopian Red Cross.

## Southern Africa

The aggravation of the situation in southern Africa induced the ICRC to step up its activities in that region.

It took many steps in accordance with its traditional protection activities in order to obtain permission to visit all persons being detained as a result of the current conflicts—although, in fact, it was able to visit only certain categories of detainees.

In addition, the ICRC increased its medical aid to victims of the conflicts by supporting the medico-social infrastructure which already existed or was being created. It also provided additional food supplies reserved, first and foremost, for children, women, and the sick and wounded victims of the events taking place. In order to carry out this programme, the ICRC made three appeals (in February, June and December) to governments, National Societies and the specialized international agencies in order to obtain their financial and material support. The ICRC relied for support in performing its humanitarian tasks in the field, on the governments, National Societies and liberation movements in the countries concerned.

The ICRC delegates kept in touch with the representatives of the southern African liberation movements including the "Patriotic Front" (ZAPU and ZANU) and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO). Through such contacts, the ICRC developed its co-operation with these movements in providing humanitarian aid and protection and disseminating knowledge of the principles of humanitarian law and of the Red Cross.

Several batches of drugs were handed over to the representatives of these movements in Angola, Mozambique and Zambia.

## Rhodesia/Zimbabwe

The ICRC delegation in Salisbury — consisting of a single delegate at the beginning of 1977 — grew considerably during the year. During the first half of the year, the Head of Delegation was joined by an Agency delegate and a field delegate. From June, the second delegate centred his activities on the western part of the country, once an office had been opened in Bulawayo.

During the second half, the delegation was reinforced by another four people with the arrival of an administrator, a