

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1979)

Rubrik: Latin 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: 12.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

LATIN AMERICA

In 1979 the ICRC considerably developed its activities in Nicaragua. It also carried out a programme of protection for persons detained in several Latin American countries: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and El Salvador (see pp. 59 on ICRC activities for "political" detainees). It continued its efforts to obtain from the Government of Uruguay permission to resume its visits to persons detained on security grounds. Finally, on 21 December, an agreement was signed under the terms of which the Uruguayan Government authorized the ICRC to visit all places of detention in accordance with its traditional practice.

The ICRC maintained a permanent delegation at Managua and a regional delegation at Buenos Aires. It was obliged to reduce its regional delegation for Central America and the Caribbean, based at Guatemala City, to a state of suspended animation, in view of its demanding commitments in Nicaragua. The office of the regional delegation for the Andean countries was similarly left vacant.

A new delegate-general for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mr. André Pasquier, was appointed on 1 February.

Missions by the President and other members of the ICRC

President Hay, accompanied by Mr. Serge Nessi, former delegate-general for Latin America, was in Cuba from 11 to 16 February for a mission during which he conferred with the Head of State, President Fidel Castro, and with other notables, including Dr. José Gutiérrez Muniz, Minister of Health and President of the National Red Cross Society; Mr. Isidoro Malmierca, Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Dr. Carlos Rafaël Rodríguez, Vice-President of the State Council and of the Council of Ministers. Mr. Hay discussed particularly the eventuality of ICRC visits to persons detained on security grounds. Subsequently a memorandum was sent to the Cuban Government giving details of the objectives and procedures of ICRC visits to such detainees. The Government pointed out that it was in the process of releasing certain categories of detainees and said that it would examine the ICRC offer when the process was completed.

Following that mission, the ICRC decided to assist the Cuban Red Cross by remitting it 20,000 Swiss francs for the purchase of medical material for the National Society's first-aiders.

From 31 May to 2 June the ICRC President was in Paraguay where he had an interview with the President of the Republic, General Alfredo Stroessner, and various senior government officials, to discuss ICRC protection for detainees in Paraguay. In addition, accompanied by the leading members of the National Society, he visited the Asuncion regions which had been ravaged by floods when the Rio Paraguay was in spate. A gift of ten tons of milk powder from the Swiss

Confederation was given to the Paraguayan Red Cross which was in charge of relief work for the flood victims.

From 3 to 8 June President Hay took part in the Eleventh Inter-American Red Cross Conference in Rio de Janeiro (see p. 76) when he had an interview with the President of the Republic of Brazil, General Joao Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, and with the Minister of Justice. His aim was to renew contact with the Brazilian authorities with a view to the resumption of ICRC protection activities. Following these summit talks the ICRC sent an offer of services to the Brazilian Government. By the end of the year no reply had been forthcoming.

Another member of the Committee, Mr. Rudolph Jäckli, represented the ICRC in Peru at the ceremonies to celebrate the Peruvian Red Cross centenary on 17 April. He also carried out two missions to Nicaragua (see below).

Nicaragua

The ICRC kept a close watch on the situation in Nicaragua. On several occasions it expressed its alarm at the worsening hostilities and violence. On 5 June the ICRC, the League and 22 National Societies of the Americas and Caribbean met in Rio de Janeiro for the Eleventh Inter-American Red Cross Conference, and launched a clamant appeal to the parties to the Nicaragua conflict to observe the fundamental humanitarian rules applicable to non-international armed conflicts, particularly rules demanding respect of persons not involved in the fighting, such as women, children, the elderly, as well as the wounded and the prisoners of war. In addition, the Inter-American Conference urged that the personnel of the humanitarian organizations working in Nicaragua (the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross) be respected and given every facility for the accomplishment of their tasks.

Indeed, the safety of its delegates and of the Nicaraguan Red Cross personnel was one of the ICRC's constant concerns. It made several overtures to the authorities of both parties, and after the ICRC delegate-general for Latin America contacted the members of the provisional Nicaraguan government in Costa Rica the ICRC delegates were issued with safe-conducts requesting commanding officers of the forces of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) to respect them and facilitate their work.

The ICRC was active in four fields in Nicaragua during 1979: apart from its traditional protective function it developed relief and medical assistance, and action in the sphere of the Central Tracing Agency immediately after the end of the conflict.

In view of the extent of its activities in Nicaragua, the ICRC maintained a permanent delegation in the country and also

sent many missions from headquarters. One of these was carried out by Mr. Jäckli, a member of the Committee. He went twice to Nicaragua where he had talks on the subject of ICRC operations with the President of Nicaragua, General Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the President of the Nicaraguan Red Cross, Mr. Ismaël Reyès, and others.

The relief activities, the medical assistance and, to some extent, the work of the CTA, was carried out in close co-operation with the Nicaraguan Red Cross. The National Society was the only organization still operational when local infrastructure in Nicaragua was disrupted. It accomplished a herculean task, and it was with profound distress that the ICRC learned of the death by violence of several members of the Nicaraguan Red Cross in the discharge of their humanitarian mission: from the autumn of 1978 to July 1979, seventeen relief workers lost their lives in the hostilities.

Protection

ICRC protective action in Nicaragua was in two phases: the first during the conflict and the second after the take-over by the *Junta de reconstrucción nacional* on 19 July.

UNDER THE FORMER RÉGIME. — During the first three months of the year ICRC delegates went to places of detention (prisons, National Guard centres and hospitals where detainees were being treated) in the capital and the provinces in order to visit, in accordance with standard practice, persons detained for political reasons or in connection with the events.

As usual, reports on the places visited were sent to the government. Delegates discussed detention problems with the highest officials of the former régime, including President Somoza whom they met on three occasions.

While the conflict grew worse from April onwards, visits continued insofar as they were not precluded by the danger involved in travel, in the capital and the rest of the country. By mid-May this protective action had noticeably declined, as fighting made it impossible to reach many places of detention inside the barracks of the National Guard.

The ICRC delegates were also concerned for the welfare of prisoners taken by the FSLN, some of whom they visited at Jinotepe. In addition, the FSLN, intending to release captured members of the National Guard in Panama, asked the ICRC to mediate and gave it a list of some thirty such prisoners. The ICRC transmitted the list to the Government but the operation was not carried out because the Government insisted on the prisoners' release in Nicaragua, to which the FSLN would not agree.

UNDER THE NEW RÉGIME. — In the days following the change of government, the ICRC delegates went to the main prisons of Managua to see that the release of persons incarcerated by the former régime did not give rise to acts of violence; the detainees of the *Central de policía* and of the *Cárcel Modelo* were thus released without incident under ICRC control.

To avoid further bloodshed during the days of transition, the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross organized in the main towns reception areas where National Guards who had laid down their arms and others, with their families, could seek refuge.

Refugees in Managua and nearby Granada who so wished were grouped in one place in Managua, so that it would be easier to assist them. On 23 July the new authorities decided to arrest them, stating they would consider them as prisoners of war. The forces of the FSLN then proceeded to take all the males to prison in Managua and the provinces. The ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross looked after the women and children, first housing them in the Managua Catholic seminary before organizing their return home when conditions permitted. Finally the ICRC was able to transfer to Costa Rica fourteen Costa-Rican lorry drivers who had been caught up in the events.

The day after the fall of the Somoza régime the ICRC delegates contacted the new authorities to obtain the necessary authorizations to continue their work of protection, but this time for the benefit of military and civilian supporters of the old régime (National Guards, senior officials of the Somoza Government, etc.) arrested during the fighting or during the take-over.

On 30 July the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Thomas Borge, authorized the ICRC to visit as it wished all places of detention and all persons in the hands of the FSLN. He gave his assurance that humanitarian principles would be respected.

On the strength of that authorization, ICRC teams of delegates, each including a doctor, began visiting places of detention in Managua and the provinces and registering new detainees. In the provinces this work continued until the end of the year in all areas which had been affected by the fighting; in December it was extended to the north-east region of the country which had been spared.

Things were different in three places of detention in Managua (except the hospitals) where there were some 3,000 people, including a large number of former National Guards. Towards the end of August the ICRC delegates were meeting many difficulties in the discharge of their tasks, especially caused by the refusal of some military commanders to admit them into the prisons in spite of the authorizations received from the new Government. In the face of this opposition, a number of overtures were made by the delegation to the Government and FSLN representatives. The delegate-general undertook two missions to seek a solution to the problem. In addition the President of the ICRC wrote to the *Junta de reconstrucción nacional* and to the Ministers of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. As a result it was possible to resume normal visits from 21 November onwards to the *Cárcel Modelo*, the *Central de Policía* and the *Zona Franca*, and the visits have continued at regular intervals ever since.

As customary, confidential reports on the visits were sent to the new authorities.

During their visits the delegates systematically recorded the prisoners' details, which enabled them to see that sometimes prisoners present during a previous visit were no longer in the

place of detention. Much concerned at this situation, the ICRC drew up a list of more than 1,250 names which it submitted to the Minister of the Interior for investigation.

The ICRC protective activities in Nicaragua may be summarized as follows: under the former régime, 82 visits to 24 places (including 6 hospitals) in which there were 748 detainees; after the change of government, i.e. from 19 July to the end of the year, 248 visits to 109 places of detention holding some 6,400 people.

Material assistance

Material and medical assistance needs made two financial appeals necessary: the first, in mid-June, was for 2.7 million Swiss francs; the second, at the end of August, was for 1 million Swiss francs.

ASSISTANCE TO CIVILIAN POPULATION. — During the early months of 1979, when the situation was relatively calm, the ICRC distributed relief supplies which had been ordered in 1978 and had arrived at the beginning of the year, mainly foodstuffs. Distribution, with the co-operation of the Nicaraguan Red Cross and other charitable institutions, was mainly to the inhabitants of the poorer districts of Managua and other main towns who had been particularly affected by the consequences of the fighting during the previous fall, and to a number of detainees' families.

From mid-April the assistance action involved a new operation. When hostilities broke out afresh the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross organized lorry convoys to convey food and medicaments to localities hit by the fighting and to support the work of various charitable organizations in those localities.

From January to May 989 tons of various relief goods (including 600 tons of food donated by the EEC) was distributed, to a value of 1,187,697 Swiss francs.

ICRC stocks were soon depleted, the situation and the general strike which started in May making it impossible to buy supplies locally, and the encirclement of Managua making it difficult to bring provisions into the town by land. To meet the increasing needs, in the provinces as well as in the capital, the ICRC began an air-lift which operated from 19 June to 16 August, except for two days during a short period of confusion in the course of the take-over by the new government, when one of the ICRC aircraft on arrival from Guatemala was commandeered by members of the National Guard trying to flee the country.

The ICRC chartered three aircraft from an American company, two DC-8's and one DC-6. The Spanish and British Governments each lent an aircraft for a short time. Other Red Cross Societies also organized flights. From the end of July only one plane was still operating on the services.

The ICRC planes flew to Managua from Miami, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia and Guatemala, and a DC-3 chartered by the ICRC flew between Costa Rica and Leon. In all, 114 ICRC flights brought in 2,082 tons of relief (2,012 tons of food, 50 tons of medical supplies and various

other articles). All medical supplies were provided by the ICRC, and the food by other relief organizations and Red Cross Societies.

Supplies were distributed by the Nicaraguan Red Cross and other charitable institutions such as CEPAD, CRISOL, CONFOR and CARITAS, the ICRC delegates supervising the transfer from the airport to the National Society's warehouses and to localities elsewhere in the country. The air-lift required the presence of ICRC delegates in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama, where temporary logistic bases were set up with the help of the National Societies.

After the hostilities, when it was considered safe to do so, the ICRC replaced the air-lift by lorry convoys (5 from Costa Rica and one from Panama) and by sea transport. From 29 July to 22 August, forty-eight lorries delivered 980 tons of food and other relief. In August and September two ships chartered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) unloaded at the Nicaraguan port of Corinto 1,925 tons of food donated by that Agency.

In all, more than 7,400 tons of relief, valued at 7.5 million Swiss francs, reached Nicaragua in the June, July and August emergency. Donors to the relief action for that period were the Red Cross Societies of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Federal Republic of Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, USA and Venezuela, and the following organizations: Catholic Relief Services, Comité Evangélico para Ayuda al Desarrollo (CEPAD), Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), CARITAS and USAID.

The new government having announced that it would take over assistance operations, the ICRC began to phase out in August. On 15 September it ceased its assistance to the population, continuing only its work for detainees.

The ICRC undertook to help the families of some former members of the National Guard—522 persons—after the establishment of the new government. Not only did it provide them, through the Nicaraguan Red Cross, with food during their several weeks of asylum in the Catholic seminary; to the poorest among them it gave financial aid and a month's supply of food to help them to resettle.

Various relief (mattresses, blankets, clothing and medicaments) were provided to people who had sought refuge in embassies.

Further relief supplies totalling 729 tons (of which 697 tons was donated by the EEC) arrived from September to December, some of which—213 tons of food and miscellaneous articles valued at 271,659 Swiss francs—was distributed to prisons, the Ocon hospital, embassies and the Catholic seminary.

ASSISTANCE TO DETAINEES. — During the final weeks of the conflict ICRC delegates had easier access to the *Central de Policía* than to other places of detention and, on 18 June, at the request of the Government, they started a food and medical assistance programme for the detainees there, some 800 persons who were hard-hit by the food shortage in the

country. The delegates personally distributed food to the prisoners every other day until the change of government.

Upon the cessation of the fighting, this action was extended to almost all places of detention in Nicaragua. The ICRC delivered enough food to enable each detainee to have two meals a day. Medicaments and personal objects were also distributed and, at Christmas, some 7,500 parcels, to detainees in prisons and in the Ocon hospital.

Medical assistance

UNDER THE FORMER RÉGIME. — In the relatively calm period at the beginning of the year, ICRC medical delegates visited detainees in prisons and hospitals, and Nicaraguan nationals who had sought refuge in embassies. Medicaments were provided as needed.

With the resumption of hostilities the ICRC stepped up its medical assistance and supported Nicaraguan Red Cross efforts by providing medical supplies and blood to the local branches in the regions visited, together with other relief, by means of special convoys organized jointly with the National Society. With the Nicaraguan Red Cross and CEPAD it also organized the transport of severely injured casualties to the capital.

When accompanying the relief convoys the ICRC delegates contacted the hospital authorities in the localities receiving help, in order to assess needs and make suitable provision to meet them, as they were doing for the hospitals in the capital. Moreover, the FSLN field hospitals at Esteli, Matagalpa and Sébaco also received aid from the ICRC during the combats.

The air-lift from mid-June onwards made it possible to increase medical assistance in Nicaragua, and at the beginning of July a four-man surgical team was sent to assist the medical personnel of the provincial hospitals at Trinidad near Esteli, at Leon and at the Jinotepe regional hospital where there were a great many casualties.

UNDER THE NEW RÉGIME. — In the days of the transition to the new régime the ICRC delegates saw to the functioning of the Managua military hospital which had previously been run by medical officers of the former régime. The ICRC surgical team, on its return from the provinces, was assigned to the military hospital until it was taken in hand by the new authorities. Later, the ICRC arranged for the war-wounded of the former régime to be transferred to the Ocon hospital, the new government having decided that only FSLN wounded should go to the Managua military hospital. The ICRC had to bring back into operation the long-disused Ocon hospital and to supply it with medicaments and food. The Guatemala Red Cross lent an operating unit. The former staff of the military hospital was also transferred to the Ocon hospital. For a short time the ICRC made available the services of an anaesthetist to work with the local surgical team.

After hostilities the ICRC continued providing medical equipment and medicaments to hospitals and to Nicaraguan Red Cross dispensaries, until the new Government took over their provisioning in mid-September. It also supplied the

Nicaraguan Red Cross blood bank with funds and equipment to enable it to keep going.

From mid-September the ICRC gave medical assistance only to people in prison and those who had sought refuge in embassies, and, to a lesser extent, to the families of former National Guardsmen in the Catholic seminary of Managua.

Medicaments, medical supplies and blood-bank equipment provided by the ICRC in 1979 was valued at 884,728 Swiss francs. Donated medical relief was estimated at more than 1,030,000 Swiss francs.

Central Tracing Agency

In mid-July the ICRC opened a Central Tracing Agency office in Managua.

The main function of the Agency delegate was to record and centralize all information on detainees who had been visited, both for their protection and for communication to their families. He also listed the 2,015 persons sheltering in embassies according to information given by the embassies, the 6,173 refugees in neighbouring countries according to information gleaned during missions to those countries, and persons reported missing.

The Agency's Managua office handled 1,021 requests for enquiries into the whereabouts of missing persons and for family news. These requests came from abroad as well as from people in Nicaragua itself. Successful enquiries resulted in 258 replies to these requests.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross contributed with information to enable replies to be sent to requests for investigation or news about civilians. The National Societies of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador assisted in the recording of Nicaraguan refugees in those countries.

A dozen persons recruited in Managua were trained to assist the ICRC delegate.

ORGANIZATION. — From four or five delegates in the first quarter of the year, the staff strength was substantially increased in mid-July when travel was not impeded by danger. At the end of July the ICRC staff strength in Nicaragua and the adjoining countries reached a peak of 16 delegates.

Nicaraguan refugees in Central America

As in 1978, the ICRC was concerned about the plight of the many Nicaraguan refugees in other Central American countries.

Surveys were carried out in Honduras and Costa Rica, before and after the change of government in Nicaragua, and also in Guatemala and El Salvador after the change.

The main ICRC aim was to provide protection by registering the refugees so far as circumstances permitted. In contrast, the responsibility for assistance was shared with the National Society and the League.

HONDURAS

The number of Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras grew constantly during the Somoza régime, and by the end of May exceeded 10,000. The ICRC continued the assistance it had begun for their benefit in 1978, drawing on its stocks in Nicaragua. From 1 January to 30 April it sent to Honduras 340 tons of food valued at 445,370 Swiss francs, all of which had been distributed by the end of July, by the Honduran Red Cross. ICRC delegates carried out several missions in the camps to supervise distribution; this enabled them to keep a close watch on how conditions for the refugees developed, and to settle problems with the authorities of Honduras and with officials of the Red Cross.

After the fall of the Somoza régime the ICRC sent several missions to Honduras to appraise the situation of the new refugees (supporters of the former régime, ex-National Guardsmen, etc.) who flowed into the country, and to register their presence in the various camps.

The unspent balance of the funds which the ICRC had given the Honduran Red Cross for the benefit of refugees in 1978 was used to purchase relief for these new refugees (see 1978 Annual Report, p. 40).

COSTA RICA

In this country the work for Nicaraguan refugees was co-ordinated by the government in co-operation with the Costa Rica Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations. The return of the refugees to Nicaragua after the change of régime was organized by the Costa Rica Red Cross and the HCR.

The ICRC did not act directly for these people but provided the National Society with 25,000 dollars towards its medical activities for Nicaraguan refugees. The CTA delegate at Managua went to Costa Rica to co-ordinate with the local Red Cross the work of registering refugees, seeking missing persons and forwarding family messages.

During the Somoza government rule, many family messages passed between Nicaragua and Costa Rica with the co-operation of the Costa Rica Red Cross, either by radio or by the ICRC air-lift.

EL SALVADOR

The ICRC gave the Santa Tecla branch of the El Salvador Red Cross financial support to help the Nicaraguan refugees in El Salvador after the change of government (about 150 people, most of them women and children).

A mission to Santa Tecla at the end of October found that almost all the refugees were solving their personal situations by settling in El Salvador or in some other country. ICRC action, therefore, was no longer required.

GUATEMALA

In September an ICRC delegate while on a mission to Guatemala conferred with the Guatemalan Red Cross on the

number, plight of, and status granted to, Nicaraguan refugees from the old and new régimes. ICRC action proved to be unnecessary: to the former the Guatemalan Government had granted permission to stay and work if they wished; the number of the latter, which varied with the course of events, never exceeded 250.

Bolivia

Following the *coup d'Etat* on 1 November and the many violent incidents which then occurred, an ICRC delegate went to Bolivia to assess the situation and to respond, *inter alia*, to a request from the Bolivian Red Cross for assistance. The ICRC provided the National Society with 66,000 Swiss francs for the purchase of medical and other equipment. It also donated an ambulance. The total cost of the assistance was 100,500 Swiss francs.

The protection work contemplated was not put into effect, all persons arrested at the time of the *coup d'Etat* being released immediately power was restored to a civilian government.

Argentina

Throughout the year the ICRC continued its efforts to protect persons detained on security grounds, by visiting them in the places of detention and by providing them and their families with material assistance. It also continued its endeavours to trace missing persons. These activities were discussed with General Albana Harguindeguy, the Minister of the Interior, Dr. Rodriguez Varela, the Minister of Justice, and with other people.

Visits to places of detention

Visits to the main places of detention in Argentina were resumed after an interruption of several weeks from December 1978 to the end of February 1979. The interruption had been requested by the Argentine Government for an examination of detention problems and, especially, of ICRC proposals following its visits to places of detention in 1978. Several overtures were made to the Argentine Government, including a letter from the ICRC President to the Minister of the Interior, urging that the interruption be not unduly prolonged.

In the course of the year ICRC delegates and medical delegates made 38 visits to 25 places of detention in which, at the end of the year, 2,200 persons were being held on security grounds. Two of the main prisons, Rawson and La Plata, were visited three times, and five, Villa Devoto, the New Caseros prison—both in Buenos Aires—Coronda, Resistencia and Cordoba, twice. All visits were carried out in accordance with ICRC requirements and were the subjects of confidential reports which were delivered to the President of the Republic and to the Minister of the Interior.

In April 1979 the practical arrangements for prison visits, agreed upon by the Argentine Government and the ICRC in 1977, were slightly changed. The ICRC was given authority to visit all persons arrested on security grounds, including those under military control in officially recognized places of detention.

In the same month the Government issued a decree introducing regulations on detention conditions for persons arrested for security reasons, and authorizing them to work, study, engage in sports, etc. In the course of their many visits the ICRC delegates found that the regulations were not uniformly applied in all prisons. In various approaches the ICRC delegation brought this to the attention of the President of the Republic, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice. In addition, tables describing conditions of detention in the main prisons of the country were handed to the authorities, who then revised the regulations concerned: the new provisions should be known in 1980.

Lastly, the ICRC intervened in favour of detainees who, having neither family nor friends, encountered difficulties in attending to requisite administrative formalities.

Persons reported missing

As in the past, the ICRC delegation in Buenos Aires delivered to the Argentine authorities lists of missing persons drawn up on the basis of statements made by their kin. The two lists delivered in 1979, containing several hundred names, brought to about 2,500 the number of cases which the ICRC had referred to the authorities since 1977.

The ICRC also made known its profound concern about a law issued by the Government and according to which any person missing could be considered dead after a certain time. The Government gave the ICRC a number of assurances that that law would not be a bar to the ICRC's requests for investigation, which would continue to receive the attention of the competent authorities.

Nevertheless, by the end of the year, no information of value was forthcoming concerning the lists of missing persons submitted.

Assistance

The ICRC assisted the most needy families of detainees. As in 1978, about 900 families in the whole country received a monthly food parcel. The poorest of them were also given clothing, medicaments, transport tickets, etc.

To detainees the ICRC gave clothing, articles for leisure-time activities, medical supplies and, to some, transport tickets upon their release. It financed some special medical treatment and to impecunious detainees it gave money for purchases at the prison canteen.

In 1979 the value of ICRC assistance to detainees and their families amounted to 527,835 Swiss francs. Most relief supplies were purchased locally. A donation of 25 tons of milk from the Swiss Confederation made it possible to increase the aid.

At the request of the Argentine authorities, the ICRC stated that it was prepared to examine, in co-operation with the National Red Cross Society, ways and means of assisting families who had been the victims of actions qualified as terrorist or subversive. However, it later became apparent that such families were either helped by official social welfare organizations or had sufficient financial resources to make ICRC intervention unnecessary.

Central Tracing Agency

There was an Agency delegate permanently at the Buenos Aires delegation. His main functions were to collect and process information on detainees and missing persons. Such information makes it possible to give more effective protection to detainees and replies to family requests for news. In 1979, the Agency office in Buenos Aires handled about 3,000 requests for enquiries, news and various interventions.

In addition, 82 ICRC travel documents were issued to refugees from various Latin American countries who wished to leave Argentina.

ORGANIZATION. — From six in the early months of the year, the Buenos Aires staff strength rose to nine—two of whom were medical delegates—when visits to places of detention were resumed. The staff always included at least one medical delegate.

Chile

Although the ICRC closed its Santiago delegation in 1978 (see Annual Report 1978, p. 43) it continued its protection. In 1979 the regional delegate based in Buenos Aires went five times to Chile to visit persons still detained and newly arrested persons, and to enquire into the whereabouts of missing persons.

He carried out eleven visits to seven places, having access to about a hundred detainees in the capital and in the provinces, to whom some relief was given from the stocks kept in Chile.

The ICRC also continued its approaches to the Chilean authorities to obtain information on the 620 missing persons mentioned on the list which had been handed to the Chilean Government in May 1978. The 620 persons had been reported as missing to the ICRC by their families. The ICRC intervened in particular after human bones had been discovered in a mine near Talagante towards the end of 1978. The Chilean authorities promised to inform the ICRC of the results of investigation as soon as they were published. At the end of 1979 the ICRC had still not received the information it had asked for.

Colombia

The ICRC carried out three series of visits to persons detained on security grounds. As it had no delegation in Colombia, delegates were sent from headquarters or from

Latin American delegations in other countries. A medical delegate took part in each visit. The ICRC visited, in accordance with its standard procedure, civilian places of detention under the authority of the Ministry of Justice and those under the Ministry of Defence: the ICRC had not had access to military places of detention since 1970. In all, the delegates made 45 visits to 26 places of detention in which there were about 550 persons detained on security grounds, for interrogation, in preventive detention, or convicted. Confidential reports on the visits were sent to the Colombian authorities.

The ICRC developed a programme—linked to its protection—to assist the detainees visited. Medicaments, some from the stocks left over from 1978, were delivered to prison dispensaries through the Colombian Red Cross. The detainees also received some articles for leisure activities.

These activities were the subject of discussion between the President of the ICRC and the President of the Republic, Mr. Julio Caesar Turbay Ayala, when the latter visited Switzerland on 16 June.

El Salvador

The ICRC several times offered its services to the authorities of El Salvador and approached the Government many times to obtain access to places of detention. Many detainees were released at the beginning of the year after the repeal of the law restricting individual freedom and authorizing detention without proof of guilt (*ley de defensa y garantía del orden público*), and the Government replied favourably to the ICRC's requests.

On 21 August the head of the ICRC delegation in Nicaragua was received by the President of El Salvador, General Carlos Humberto Romero, who authorized the ICRC to visit all prisons under the authority of the Ministry of Justice and all places of detention under the Security authorities and in military barracks. This agreement was confirmed in a letter to the President of the ICRC, who then wrote to the Salvadorean authorities, stating the objectives of visits (protection of detainees and not the verification of the presence or absence of "political" detainees), and the procedure of such visits. The El Salvador Government and the ICRC agreed that the visits should start in October, and two delegates went to El Salvador for that purpose.

However, in mid-October, after the overthrow of President Romero and the take-over by a military junta, the delegate-general for Latin America had to go to El Salvador in an endeavour to induce the new authorities not to prevent ICRC

action for political and security detainees. The authorities accepted the ICRC offer of services and the visits began on 26 October.

By 1 December 1979 the ICRC delegates had visited 92 places, i.e. 41 security units, 5 garrisons, 2 Customs Police stations, 6 municipal prisons, 4 hospitals, 2 centres for minors and 32 places of detention under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. In eleven of these 32 places of detention there were 22 persons detained on security or political grounds. In these visits the ICRC delegates covered almost all civilian and military places of detention in the country and had access to persons detained for interrogation, on remand or after conviction.

Moreover, the frequent missions from headquarters or from the Nicaragua delegation permitted a watch to be kept on how the general situation in El Salvador, which was tense throughout the year, was developing, and to assess the El Salvador Red Cross Society's ability to take action should conflict break out. To give support to the National Society, which had acted with efficiency during various demonstrations and troubles which had affected the country, the delegate-general and the Society prepared a plan to increase its operational capacity. The plan was later discussed with the League, which appealed to ten National Societies for about 200,000 Swiss francs.

The ICRC was also called upon to concern itself for hostages held by various opposition movements after other mediation attempts had failed and the ICRC was the only remaining possibility.

The ICRC appealed to the parties holding the hostages to treat them with humanity and stated that it was prepared to visit the hostages purely for humanitarian reasons (to see the conditions of detention, to provide medical assistance, and to comfort the hostages and their families). It made it clear that such visits would in no way affect the negotiations for release. An ICRC medical delegate was allowed to visit three hostages, two of them British and one Japanese.

Paraguay

ICRC delegates twice visited 12 persons detained on security or political grounds in seven places. Three of the detainees were released in 1979.

In addition, the ICRC delegates submitted to the Paraguayan authorities a list of 24 persons reported missing. By the end of the year the ICRC had received no reply concerning these people.

Five detainees' families were helped by the ICRC.