

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1982)

Rubrik: Europe and North 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: 24.08.2025

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



A relief distribution at Gdansk (Poland) (photo Jean-Claude Marti)

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

The ICRC's main operation in Europe took place in Poland. Besides this, the ICRC kept in close contact with most of the National Societies and Governments of the countries of Europe and North America to inform them of its operational activities throughout the world and to discuss their support for these activities. This support was given in the form of financial contributions or aid in kind, or by providing the ICRC with qualified personnel. The ICRC also sent representatives to several Red Cross seminars organized in Europe and in North America (see chapter "National Societies") and continued its activities arising from the Second World War or from later conflicts in Europe (see also chapter entitled "Central Tracing Agency").

The President of the ICRC carried out several missions to European countries and to North America. He went to Paris on 2 March to meet Mr. Claude Cheysson, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Their discussions covered the various operational activities of the ICRC, the campaign against torture and the dissemination of international humanitarian law. During this visit he also had talks with Mr. Soutou, President of the French Red Cross. On mission in Canada from 5 to 9 March, President Hay met Prime Minister Trudeau, senior officials of the External Affairs Department and the Canadian Agency for International Development, and the heads of the Canadian Red Cross, and discussed the current activities of the ICRC, the dissemination of international humanitarian law and the ratification of the Protocols. During his visit to the United States from 9 to 12 March, President Hay took part in a seminar on international humanitarian law, organized in Washington by the American Red Cross and the Washington College of Law (see chapter entitled "Information: dissemination in universities"). The President also had talks with American government representatives, in particular Mr. Walter Stoessel, Deputy Secretary of State, and Mr. Fred Ikle, Under-Secretary of Defense, and with the principal representatives of the National Society. In New York he was received by Mr. Perez de Cuellar, Secretary General of the United Nations. In Brussels on 4 May, President Hay met the European Economic Community officials in charge of humanitarian aid. At the end of June he carried out a mission in Poland (see below). At the invitation of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Hay stayed in Dublin on 1 and 2 July (see chapter "Principles and Law: Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 8 June 1977"). On this occasion he also visited the Irish Red Cross. Finally, Mr. Hay went on a mission to the Federal Republic of Germany from 2 to 7 September. He stopped over at Arolsen to attend the annual meeting of the International Commission of the International Tracing Service, and then in Bonn. He met Mr. Karstens, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, with the President of the Bundestag and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as leading members of the German Red Cross.

Several European personalities were welcomed at ICRC headquarters in Geneva by President Hay or the Vice-President, Mr. Richard Pestalozzi, and also by members of the Committee and the Directorate: Mgr Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, on 23 February; Mr. François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic, on 2 June; Pope John Paul II, on 15 June; Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister, on 12 August.

*
* * *

Mr. Frank Schmidt, delegate-general for Europe and North America, left the ICRC at the beginning of November.

Poland

Shortly after the imposition of martial law in Poland on 13 December 1981, the ICRC sent delegates there to evaluate the needs of the civilian population regarding protection and assistance and to offer its services to the Polish authorities, which the latter accepted.

Hence, in 1982, the ICRC was able to give protection and assistance to internees and helped to restore contact between the Poles and their families abroad via its Central Tracing Agency. Furthermore, the ICRC and the League, in conjunction with the Polish Red Cross, carried out an extensive assistance programme for the civilian population, on the basis of an agreement defining the conditions of action by the International Red Cross in Poland, which had been signed on 23 December 1981 and was maintained in 1982. The operational activities were backed up by an appropriate information campaign (see chapter entitled: "Information in the field").

At the beginning of the year, the ICRC delegation in Warsaw consisted of five people. As its activities developed, this number was increased to 27 by the beginning of May, then from summer on was gradually reduced again to 11 people by the end of December. These figures include the delegates from the League (5 at the beginning of May) who, in accordance with the agreement between the League and the ICRC, were integrated in the Warsaw delegation to deal more specifically with the civilian relief operation.

In Geneva, the ICRC-League joint office, set up at the end of 1981 to co-ordinate operations in Poland, was maintained in 1982.

ICRC activities in Poland (including the joint assistance programme) necessitated three appeals for financial support: the first, in January, for 42.7 million Swiss francs for the first four months of the year; the second, in May, for 40.2 million for the period from 1 May to 31 October; the third, in

December, for 18.3 million for the period from 1 November 1982 to 30 June 1983.

In the course of their work, the ICRC delegates in Warsaw had frequent talks with the Polish authorities and the episcopate. These relations were consolidated by missions carried out from Geneva.

At the invitation of the Polish Red Cross, President Hay stayed in Poland on a working visit from 21 to 25 June, accompanied by the delegate-general for Europe and North America and the Head of the Press Division. The ICRC President was received by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the Prime Minister. He also met Mr. P. Stefanski, Deputy Marshal (Deputy Speaker) of the Sejm, the Polish parliament, Mr. J. Czyrek, Foreign Minister, Mr. T. Szelachowski, Minister of Health, Mrs. Regent-Lechowicz, Deputy Minister of Justice, Mr. W. Bien, Deputy Minister of Finance, as well as the leaders of the Polish Red Cross. The purpose of this mission was to take stock, with the authorities and the Polish Red Cross, of all the activities carried out by the International Red Cross in their country. During his talks with the government representatives, Mr. Hay particularly discussed protection activities for internees and the possibility of extending these activities to persons arrested. During his mission in Poland, President Hay visited the detention centre of Bialoleka and went to the towns of Lodz and Plock, where he was received by representatives of the local branches of the Red Cross and by the municipal authorities.

The delegate-general, accompanied by a representative of the League, visited Poland again from 25 to 28 August for talks with the Polish Red Cross and the authorities on the joint assistance programme and the ICRC's protection activities. He met Mr. Z. Komender, Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. S. Zawadski, Minister of Justice, as well as the Deputy Minister of the Interior and the Deputy Foreign Minister. Most of these people were visited again in December, this time by the regional delegate for Eastern Europe. The discussions were mainly concerned with questions of protection.

Protection

PERSONS INTERNED UNDER THE MARTIAL LAW.— Throughout 1982 the ICRC was able to give its protection to the persons interned following the proclamation of martial law on 13 December 1981, after its offer of services to the Polish authorities on 21 December 1981 had received their consent on 21 January 1982. The protection activities began at once and continued until 23 December 1982, when martial law was raised and the last internees were released.

In 1982, 4,851 internees were visited in 24 different places during 79 visits, three of which were to Mr. Lech Walesa. Many internees were seen several times; some were visited in hospital where they were receiving medical treatment.

The visits to internees were carried out in accordance with the criteria of the ICRC, which was able to interview without witnesses the persons of its choice (the Warsaw delegation included Swiss interpreters). Official approval of the principle of repeated visits had been acquired from the start, and certain

centres were even visited five times. At its request the ICRC gradually obtained, from the Polish authorities and the officials in charge of the camps, precise and regular information on the number of detention centres (this number varied during the year according to events), the number of internees, and the transfer and release of persons. The visits to internees, which were the subject of confidential reports destined solely for the Polish authorities, were carried out by groups of four delegates including a doctor.

Following these visits the ICRC delegates, in the course of the year, submitted 499 requests to the Polish authorities for releases on medical grounds, of which 296 were granted. In addition, they recommended special medical treatment for more than 800 internees and drew the attention of the authorities and the National Society to a number of special cases.

PERSONS ARRESTED SINCE THE PROCLAMATION OF MARTIAL LAW.— In 1982, the ICRC tried to extend its action of protection to persons arrested and those sentenced under the martial law, and offered its services for this purpose to the Polish authorities on 18 May. Other steps were taken throughout the year to gain access to the persons arrested. President Hay broached this subject in June when he met the Prime Minister, General Jaruzelski.

Despite these negotiations, the ICRC had still not obtained permission, at the end of 1982, to visit the persons arrested.

Tracing Agency

Following the breakdown in communications between Poland and other countries, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency in Geneva helped to restore family contacts by making it possible to exchange Red Cross messages; 7,170 messages were transmitted via Geneva between Poland and a number of other countries, with the help of the Polish Red Cross. This activity decreased considerably after July, when the Polish postal service was resumed.

The ICRC served as an intermediary between the Polish authorities and Polish nationals abroad, transmitting requests for family reuniting. The Central Tracing Agency received 301 requests concerning 572 persons. Priority was given to children left alone in Poland; 86 people, 57 of whom were children on their own, were able to join their relatives abroad.

A tracing office was created within the Warsaw delegation. In connection with the action of protection, it systematically registered all internees visited by the ICRC, their transfers and release. It also handled requests for family news and forwarded Red Cross messages between internees and relatives abroad.

Relief

FOR INTERNEES.— Through the Polish Red Cross, the ICRC distributed, once a month, parcels of toilet articles to

the internees (15,250 parcels in 1982). These parcels were made up with the help of several donor National Societies.

FOR THE CIVILIAN POPULATION. — With the close collaboration of the Polish Red Cross, the League and the ICRC jointly carried out a programme of assistance for the most vulnerable sections of the civilian population in 49 different voivodships (districts).

The beneficiaries were aged, sick or disabled people, who received food and clothing, infants and their mothers who received food, sanitary articles, and layettes, and children of large families who were given food aid. Aid was also given to the victims of the floods which occurred at the beginning of the year. In the summer, a special food aid programme was carried out in 78 holiday camps run by the Polish Red Cross, during which 32,320 physically and socially needy children received aid. In November, a special feeding programme was started for 16,000 sick children suffering from poor digestive absorption, tuberculosis or diabetes. The second appeal for financial support did not have the desired results, so the assistance programme had to be revised in the course of the year. Consequently, the number of beneficiaries and the amount of individual aid distributed had to be reduced.

These distributions were made by the Polish Red Cross. Regular missions assessed the changing needs in the different areas assisted. They were carried out by relief experts, who were provided for the joint assistance programme by the Red Cross Societies of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

To facilitate the distribution of aid, the International Red Cross provided about sixty trucks for the Polish Red Cross. An ICRC radio operator also went to Poland to set up a communications system between the National Society headquarters and a dozen of its branches.

*
* *

The overall relief action in 1982 (including relief to internees) amounted to about 16,000 tons of goods and more than 61 million Swiss francs, i.e. 12,000 tons of food worth 34 million Swiss francs, approximately 3,000 tons of clothing worth 21 million Swiss francs, medical items, blankets etc.

Medical assistance

The joint operation of the League and the ICRC also included medical aid.

Following a mission by one of its doctors, the ICRC concentrated more particularly on a programme to supply Polish hospitals. It specified sets of medicaments and medical equipment required which were then put together by the Red Cross Societies of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Great Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the ICRC itself. Such medical supplies were sent to 411 hospitals, 49 state hospitals, 345 district hospitals and 17 specialized hospital units. From three different sets, the assorted items were later standardized: In 1982, 1,710 sets of medical supplies representing more than 13 million Swiss francs were distributed.

Three other programmes were carried out in the course of the joint operation: supplying essential medicaments to the SOS pharmacy of the Polish Red Cross; sending special medicaments for the treatment of individual cases; sending equipment to collect blood. The medicine sent to Poland was selected on the basis of the following three criteria: the medicaments had to be made abroad, they had to be unobtainable in Poland and had to be indispensable for the treatment of certain diseases.

The total value of the joint medical aid was approximately 28 million Swiss francs.

Spain

The ICRC tried to obtain permission to undertake a new series of visits to persons imprisoned under the anti-terrorist laws, the category of detainees to which it had already had access in 1981. For this purpose, the delegate-general for Europe and North America went to Madrid on 8 June, where he met Mr. Enrique Galavis, director general of penitentiary institutions with the Ministry of Justice. An agreement in principle regarding these visits has been confirmed, but for practical reasons it was not possible to carry out any protection activities in Spain in 1982.

**RELIEF AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPLIED
OR FORWARDED BY THE ICRC IN 1982 ***

EUROPE

Country	Beneficiaries	Relief		Medical Assistance	Total Sw. Fr.
		Tonnage	Value in Sw. Fr.	Value in Sw. Fr.	
Poland**	Civilian population, sick persons, internees, National Society	16,208	61,177.650	28,513,250	89,690,900
TOTAL		16,208	61,177.650	28,513,250	89,690,900

* Including food aid from the Swiss Confederation and aid provided in the course of activities with special financing.

** Joint League-ICRC operation.

THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE AT AROLSEN

Founded in 1943 in London by the Allied authorities and transferred in 1946 to Arolsen, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the International Tracing Service (ITS) contains all the documents relating to the occupants of the concentration camps and to displaced persons in Germany.

Until 1954, the ITS was run by the Allied High Commission for Germany. In 1955, the Governments of the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany requested the ICRC, as a neutral organization, to take charge of directing and running the ITS. On the basis of the agreements reached the ICRC has assumed the management of this organization for 27 years. In accordance with these agreements, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany covers the running costs of the ITS which, in 1982, amounted to DM 9,791,000. During the year, the number of staff at the ITS was about 250 persons.

At the end of the Second World War, the ITS's main task was to trace those who had been captured or displaced, both in Germany and in the countries occupied by German troops, and to bring together separated families. Later on its activities changed. Now they consist principally in gathering, classifying, storing and making available to research workers in various fields, the documents relating to the Germans and non-Germans detained in Nazi labour and concentration camps, and to the non-Germans displaced because of the hostilities. The actual work of tracing missing persons represents less than 10% of the work of the ITS which, moreover, is only competent to trace missing non-Germans, as the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany deals with German citizens.

The ITS handles two kinds of enquiries by means of its archives: tracing missing persons or confirming detention, forced labour or deportation. Those who were deported need this confirmation to be able to assert their claims to a pension or indemnity. They themselves, their immediate families and dependents, and institutions dealing with questions of indemnity and who apply on behalf and in the name of the victims, are authorized to receive the information contained in the ITS archives.

In 1982, to requests from 37 countries, the ITS sent out 60,328 replies based on its archive material. Of that number, 8,755 were certificates or reports of detention in concentration camps, 5,013 certificates of assignment to labour for a German employer, 2,938 certificates or reports of periods in displaced persons camps after the war, 508 sickness certificates, 226 death certificates and 2,620 replies relating to missing persons.

Each year the ITS publishes an annual report of its activities, from which the above figures are taken.