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# COMMUNICATIONS

For the Communications Department as for the rest of the institution, 1990 was a year for emergency action, especially in connection with events in the Middle East. In the first half of the year, a particular effort was made by the Press Division to respond to the media's urgent requests for news about the abduction of Elio Erriquez and Emanuel Christen, the two ICRC orthopaedic technicians working in Sidon, Lebanon. Starting in August, events gathered pace with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, then the release, one after the other, of the two delegates and, finally, the beginning of the operation to repatriate all prisoners of war between Iran and Iraq. Each time, a great many requests for interviews from journalists around the world converged on the press attachés and spokesmen at the Press Division in Geneva and in the delegations in the field.

## **Relations with the press**

From the beginning of the Gulf crisis, calls from the international media flooded into the Press Division. During the same period, the ICRC delegate based in Cairo and one of the ICRC delegates in New York devoted most of their time to meeting journalists and relaying information. This was part of a strategy of regionalization aimed at improving contacts with journalists in the countries where the ICRC works. In addition, a press attaché was sent to Amman, Jordan, in September to cover the work in the reception and transit camps set up at short notice to assist the thousands of foreign nationals fleeing Iraq and Kuwait.

The events in the Gulf region demonstrated the risks taken by journalists covering conflicts. In its contacts with various journalists' organizations and

editors, the ICRC explained how its "Hot Line"<sup>1</sup> works.

## **Seminar for Asian journalists**

The ICRC organized a seminar entitled "Focus on the media and the ICRC" in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for 19 journalists from six Asian countries (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) and Hong Kong. Representatives of the Communications Department, the regional delegates based in Jakarta and Hong Kong and the head of the Philippines delegation also took part in the seminar, which was held from 13 to 15 November 1990. This was the last in a series of six regional seminars which have been held since 1986, thanks to financing made available to the Communications Department by the Aga Khan Foundation for a training programme involving both ICRC headquarters staff and the media in countries where the ICRC works.

The seminar's programme covered various aspects of the ICRC's role and activities, in particular in Asia, and included discussion of the institution's rule of discretion, which the media often fail to understand, the occasional use for political purposes of information on humanitarian activities, and protection for journalists on dangerous missions during armed conflicts.

## **Dispatches and news magazines**

Some 50 press releases and communications to the press were issued concerning

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<sup>1</sup> Special telephone line that can be used by professional associations and editors should journalists disappear, be arrested or otherwise be in danger.

events of direct topicality. Special newsletters were sent to the information bureaux of the National Societies.

As in previous years, the ICRC published its monthly *Bulletin* and continued its editorial and administrative cooperation in producing the Movement's magazine *Red Cross/Red Crescent* which is published three times a year.

### Missions and co-productions

In 1990, the main emphasis in on-the-spot reporting was placed on co-productions with photo agencies and television networks to cover ICRC field operations as quickly and effectively as possible, and particularly to ensure that the resulting coverage was distributed through professional channels and rapidly reached the public.

Ten such reports were produced in 1990, either by ICRC staff alone or in conjunction with photo agencies or TV networks; missions for this purpose took place in Romania (text and photos in January), Cambodia (text and photos in March), four Latin American countries (text and photos in April/May), Liberia (co-production with the French news agency TV CAPA in June and video production by the ICRC in July), Jordan (ICRC video production in October), Afghanistan (co-production with Swiss German-language television in October, text and photos in December) and Angola (text and photos in November). Two photo reports were produced in 1990, one in Iran to cover the repatriation of prisoners of war, and the other in Afghanistan.

The team that went to Afghanistan was incidentally the first to film in Mazar-i-Sharif, in the north of the country where no other television network had ever been able to go before, whilst the two press attachés who went on mission to Angola

took part in the first relief convoys since the beginning of the civil war, leaving from Luanda and Windhoek respectively, to reach the Planalto across national borders and lines dividing the warring parties.

The ICRC has also obtained distribution rights within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to one of the six short films of a series entitled "How are the kids?" on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The sixth film, made by the Swiss director Jean-Luc Godard, deals with "the right to education and the right not to be involved in war", subjects of great concern to the ICRC.

### RCBS radio programmes

ICRC radio programmes, beamed by the Red Cross Broadcasting Service (RCBS) twice a month in six languages to Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East, totalled some 100 hours in 1990. They are transmitted free of charge by the Swiss Postal and Telecommunications Administration (PTT), with support from Swiss Radio International (RSI).

RCBS programmes focus mainly on current events and ICRC operations in the field. Key transmissions in 1990 dealt with Liberia, Romania, Sri Lanka, southern Sudan, and many subjects relating to the Middle East (Lebanon, Iran/Iraq and the Kuwait crisis).

In addition, recorded programmes are regularly sent to over 50 National Societies and to national broadcasting services. Special programmes are also prepared in Portuguese for 10 different radio stations and in German for a station in New York.

A programme on the territories occupied by Israel was co-produced with Radio France Internationale (RFI) and sent to RFI's 50 broadcasting partners and to 40

National Societies. Two programmes were co-produced with Swiss Radio International: one in Arabic on ICRC activities in the Middle East (sent to 17 National Societies) and another in English on the emergency operation in Jordan.

## **Publications**

The ICRC continued to promote its publications as widely as possible. Most of them are in Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. Last year, particular importance was attached to the publication of brochures in Bulgarian, Romanian and Russian, a development brought about by the extension of ICRC activities in Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

In 1990, the ICRC once again took part in the Geneva Press and Book Fair and the Paris Book Fair, where it presented its periodicals and other publications. Such events are also an opportunity to inform visitors about ICRC activities worldwide and the work of its delegates.

The ICRC's public library, abundantly stocked with some 15,000 books on subjects ranging from humanitarian law to current events in international politics, registered 13% more books borrowed than in the previous year. This rise can doubtless be explained in large part by the computerization of the library's card file (begun in 1988 and carried out in close conjunction with the library of the Henry Dunant Institute) which has facilitated access to the books and consultation by people outside the ICRC.

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<sup>2</sup> A catalogue of publications may be obtained by writing to the Publishing and Documentation Service, International Committee of the Red Cross, 19, av. de la Paix, 1202 Geneva.

## **International Review of the Red Cross**

As in previous years, the *International Review of the Red Cross*, which is the ICRC's official publication serving the entire Movement, published six issues containing a great many articles dealing with topics relating to international humanitarian law. Two special issues were also published, one with contributions from several National Societies, the ICRC and the League on communication within the Movement, and the other to mark the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons. The latter included articles on the problem of excessively injurious or indiscriminate weapons and the development of new anti-personnel weapons.

## **Public relations**

An official presentation of the travelling exhibition entitled "Humanity in the midst of war" was held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern on 12 January. It was attended by Mr. Flavio Cotti, Head of the Federal Department of Internal Affairs, Mr. Karl Kennel, President of the Swiss Red Cross, and ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga. The exhibition, which deals with the protection afforded by international humanitarian law to the victims of armed conflict, had been inaugurated at the United Nations headquarters in New York in November 1989.

It later went on show at the United Nations Office in Geneva to coincide with the work of the Commission on Human Rights, before going on to Berlin and Dresden in June and July, to Bucharest in October and Vienna in November.

## **Public Support Group (PSG)**

In accordance with Resolution IV of the 1989 Council of Delegates, the ICRC and

the League set up the Public Support Group that same year to coordinate communication within the Movement and increase the capacity of the National Societies' information services.

The members of the Public Support Group come from the ICRC, the League, eight National Societies and the International Promotion Bureau, a joint ICRC/League body. They met twice in 1990, in Geneva in March and October,

to encourage and oversee the various activities to implement the Movement's information policy as adopted by the Council of Delegates in October 1989. They gave particular attention to such subjects as World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, the World Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War and the drawing up of a "Communicator's Guide" for information experts within the Movement.