

# America

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## AMERICA

### Cuba

During the struggle in Cuba between the rebel forces led by Mr. Fidel Castro and the Government in Havana then in power, the ICRC lent its assistance in behalf of the victims of the conflict <sup>1</sup>. Following these events the International Committee undertook other activities in the island in 1959.

On January 1, 1959, the date on which the victorious troops of Fidel Castro entered Havana, an appeal from the President of the new Red Cross Society constituted reached the ICRC which immediately sent a delegate, Mr. P. Jequier, to Cuba.

The delegate left Geneva on January 3 ; he had been instructed to give every assistance possible to the Society to enable it to deal with the new tasks with which it was faced, and also to carry out the traditional work of the ICRC in behalf of all victims of the events in accordance with humanitarian principles and Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions which defines the basis of the International Committee's action in armed conflicts not of an international character.

The delegate of the ICRC was warmly welcomed by the new President of the Red Cross, to whom he gave every assistance in reorganising the Society in conformity with the regulations in this connection and putting into effect various relief actions made necessary by the events. Steps were immediately taken for a first emergency relief action in the Santiago-de-Cuba area where heavy fighting had occurred. The Cuban Red Cross distributed 30 tons of relief supplies to the victims, including a gift of 2,000 blankets from the ICRC. The delegate and the heads of the Cuban Red Cross also drew up programmes for long-term relief actions.

Shortly after his arrival at Havana, Mr. Jequier approached the authorities to ask for permission to visit all places where civilian or military partisans of the former regime were under detention. He had several interviews with members of the newly constituted Government who showed a most understanding and

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<sup>1</sup> See *Annual Report 1958*, pp. 18-20.

courteous attitude towards the matter, assured him that the humanitarian principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions would be respected and confirmed that he would be granted all facilities for visiting places of detention. This authorisation enabled the ICRC, with the support of the Cuban Red Cross, to extend the field of its activities in Cuba. A programme was established and on January the delegate visited the former Columbia Military Camp where a number of officers and men were interned.

However, following the entire reorganisation of the government and administrative services, a few adjustments had to be made in the programme for visiting places of detention. On March 9, 1959, the delegate of the ICRC resumed his work and, accompanied by the President of the Cuban Red Cross, he visited the Cabana Fortress, Havana, where about one thousand political detainees (military personnel and civilians) were held. He was at liberty to make enquiries concerning material conditions of detention and to speak without witnesses with detainees of his choice. As he had noted that, in some cases, medical treatment appeared to be inadequate, the Cuban Red Cross offered to organise a medical-pharmaceutical relief action, to which the ICRC contributed the sum of \$1,000.

Following these two visits the authorities concerned were informed of the points noted by the representatives of the Red Cross and their suggestions for improvements in this connection.

The first aims of his mission having been achieved, Mr. Jequier returned to Geneva on March 14 to give a report on his work. On April 26, accompanied by Mr. P. Delarue, Assistant-Delegate, he returned to Cuba to continue his mission.

On their arrival in Havana, the delegates immediately made the necessary approaches in order to arrange a new programme of visits to places of detention in the capital and throughout the island with the co-operation of the Cuban Red Cross and the authorities. They were well received by the authorities and were able to start a new series of visits to political detainees on May 7.

They made a first visit (of which no previous notice had been given) to the Castillo del Principe, an important municipal prison in Havana where about 600 political detainees were held at the time. They were left entirely free to inspect the prison premises

and to question a number of detainees on the subject of internment conditions.

In Havana, they visited in the same conditions the Cabana Fortress, which Mr. Jequier had already inspected in March. During this second visit they noted that on several points (medical care in particular) considerable improvement had been made.

On May 12, the delegates visited the Cuban State Prison for men situated in the Island of Pines ("Treasure Island"), in the province of Havana. At that time some 600 prisoners were serving sentences. The prison is run on very modern lines. Later they also visited the Cuban State Prison for women at Guanajay near Havana.

After each visit the detaining authorities and the Cuban Red Cross were given a copy of the delegates' report to the ICRC in Geneva. After receiving these reports, the General Director of Prisons in Cuba—who showed great understanding and a most co-operative attitude towards the delegates' activities—called a Press conference for the purpose of communicating the impartial comments of the delegates on their visits to places of detention. This conference was followed by a television programme on May 21, during which the General Director of Prisons, accompanied by other persons, spoke about the general conditions of detention, and Mr. Jequier explained the humanitarian action of the ICRC in behalf of political detainees and recalled that its sole object was to ascertain that detention conditions duly conformed to humanitarian principles.

The delegates (provided with written authority to visit all places of detention of their choice) continued to pursue their activities throughout the entire Cuban territory. In each of the six provinces (Oriente, Havana, Las Villas, Camagüey, Pinar del Rio and Matanzas) they had free access to various prisons without giving previous notice of their visits.

When their mission came to an end the International Committee's representatives had visited 14 principal places of detention. In addition to the report on each visit sent to the detaining authorities, the Cuban Red Cross and the ICRC in Geneva, the delegates made a short summary of the points noted during their mission. They were assured by the Cuban authorities that their suggestions

for certain improvements in detention conditions would be given careful consideration.

## **Nicaragua**

Following their mission in Cuba, the delegates went to Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, where their visit was awaited by the National Society of the country.

A short time previously the Republic of Nicaragua had been the theatre of disturbances followed by the arrest of rebels who had taken up arms. The prisoners had since then been kept in solitary confinement and their families had asked the National Red Cross Society to approach the Government authorities to enable them to receive news and to be allowed to send relief parcels to their relatives. The International Committee had also received a request for its intervention in behalf of these detained persons.

On their arrival in Managua, Mr. Jequier and Mr. Delarue found that the directorate and members of the Nicaraguan Red Cross were most willing to co-operate with them. On June 24 the delegates were received by the President of the Republic, Mr. Luis Somoza, in the presence of Mr. Rafael Cabrera, President of the Nicaraguan Red Cross. During the interview Mr. Jequier informed the Head of the State of the position of the International Committee in regard to political detainees. The delegates from Geneva were then given authority to visit the persons arrested following the recent events.

The visits took place on June 24 and 25 in Managua. The delegates were accompanied by Mr. Rafael Cabrera, President, and Dr. Marcelino L. Mora, Secretary-General, of the Nicaraguan Red Cross and two senior army officers. In the six places of detention visited they saw and conversed freely with 130 prisoners. On the whole, conditions were found to be satisfactory and the delegates gave a report on their visit to the President of the Republic.

This mission to Nicaragua helped to relieve the anxiety of families who thus obtained news of their relatives under detention. Before they left the delegates were assured by the authorities that visits could be continued by the Nicaraguan Red Cross.

## Other countries in Latin America

Mr. Jequier and Mr. Delarue took advantage of their stay in this part of the American Continent to make a brief visit to Mexico, where they had some interesting discussions on questions of mutual interest with the directorate of the Mexican Red Cross.

Mr. Jequier also went to Port-au-Prince, capital of the Republic of Haiti. He was welcomed by the Haitian Red Cross, with which he had several profitable interviews.

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No special activities were undertaken by the ICRC in other Latin American countries in 1959 ; its resident delegates in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia continued to remain in contact with the authorities and the Red Cross Societies concerned and to discuss with them any questions of mutual interest which arose during the year.

With a view to strengthening good relations in Latin American countries, a member of the Committee, Professor A. Franceschetti, took advantage of an invitation of the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology to make a tour of Latin America and to visit the National Societies and authorities. During his long trip he visited Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and was cordially welcomed everywhere. He had many interviews with directorates of National Societies and also had the privilege of meeting several leading statesmen. Thus good use was made of a valuable opportunity of discussing problems concerning the general activities of the Red Cross and the special duties of the International Committee.

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It may be mentioned that, in view of the events of the past few years in Latin America, the ICRC considered that the time had come to make a closer study of the field of action of the Red Cross in internal disturbances and to have an exchange of views on the subject with the National Societies of that continent. It suggested

therefore that these Societies should take part in a meeting in Geneva, in 1959, to examine this problem in the light of recent experience and prepare the way for a study by a Commission of Experts.

As the Red Cross Societies did not respond in sufficient numbers to the invitation the plan had to be given up. Nevertheless, the ICRC received interesting information from some of the Societies which could be used as a basis for the work of a Commission of Experts which might possibly be convened later on.

## **Europe**

### **Hungary**

The ICRC sent a further mission to Budapest in June for the discussion of various matters with the Hungarian Red Cross, including machine tools for the artificial limb workshop, the sending of medicaments of vital need and the reuniting of families.

### **Greece**

Following the mission which visited various places of detention in Greece <sup>1</sup> from December 1958 to January 1959, during the past year the ICRC sent several consignments of relief supplies to the Greek Red Cross. As formerly, the beneficiaries were political prisoners and members of their families.

## **VISITS TO POLITICAL DETAINEES**

We stated in the previous Annual Report <sup>2</sup>, the principles whereby the ICRC undertook to visit, in various countries, political prisoners who had been arrested although no state of civil war

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<sup>1</sup> See *Annual Report 1958*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 29-30.