

# External relations and information

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## EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INFORMATION

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### Relations with international organizations

The International Organizations Division and other ICRC departments maintained close contact, both in New York and Geneva, with the United Nations Organization and its specialized agencies, particularly with those bodies undertaking humanitarian tasks.

ICRC staff attended the thirty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights, in February-March, in Geneva, and the two annual sessions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), from 14 April to 8 May in New York and from 1 to 24 July in Geneva.

As usual, the deliberations of the thirty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly, in September-December, in New York, were closely followed and provided the opportunity for numerous contacts between ICRC representatives, delegations and the Office of the United Nations Secretary General on questions of common interest.

The ICRC's concern for displaced persons in Africa prompted it to take part, as an observer, in two conferences convened by the United Nations in Geneva: the conference on Namibia (7-14 January) and the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (9-10 April). The ICRC delegation at the latter meeting was headed by its President; a report on ICRC activity on the African continent was distributed to participants.

Contacts were maintained and developed with regional organizations. The ICRC was represented at the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe (26-30 January, 11-15 May and 29 September-2 October) in Strasbourg; at the special session of the Organization of American States (OAS) on extradition from 16 to 25 February in Caracas, and at the eleventh session of the OAS in Santa Lucia, from 3 to 12 December; at the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh sessions of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), in Addis Ababa (23 February-2 March) and in Nairobi (15-20 June).

The International Organizations Division also followed the deliberations of the Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, in New Delhi (4-12 February), and those of the meeting of the Co-ordination Office of that movement (special session on Namibia) in Algiers (16-18 April).

Among other meetings, conferences, assemblies or congresses attended by the ICRC, the following should be mentioned:

- the sixty-seventh session of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO), from 14 to 24 January in Geneva, and the thirty-fourth session of the World Health Assembly, from 4 to 22 May, also in Geneva;
- the annual session of the Administrative Council of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), from 4 to 16 May in New York;
- the meetings of donor countries contributing towards financing humanitarian work in Cambodia/Thailand, on 6 March, 28 May, 10 September and 25 November, in New York;
- the conference on nuclear war in Europe, from 22 to 24 April, in Groningen (Netherlands) and the Harvard Medical School seminar, in Boston (1-2 December) on "The threat of nuclear war: biological, psychological and social dimensions";
- the Round Table on the problems raised by the massive displacement of persons in quest of asylum, at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, San Remo, from 22 to 25 June;
- the thirty-second session of the Executive Council of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), on 12 October, in Geneva.

### Public relations and information

The year 1981 witnessed the accomplishment of the final stage in efforts by the ICRC and League to harmonize their means of action in one of the most advanced domains of information: audio-visual techniques.

Recognizing that they were using the same procedures to portray their activities, the two institutions had decided that it would be advisable to share their equipment, personnel and other resources in order to provide better services to the National Societies, the media and the general public. A proposal to this effect had been approved by the Twenty-third International Red Cross Conference (Bucharest, 1977). The project became a reality with the official inauguration on 30 September 1981 of the International Red Cross Audio-Visual Centre, jointly operated by the ICRC and League. The formal decision to set up and operate the centre dated from 8 October 1980, with the signature by the President of the ICRC and the Secretary General of the League of an agreement defining the objectives and operating procedures of such a centre (see Annual Report 1980, p. 81). The signing of this agreement was a milestone in co-operation between the two institutions, as it was the first time they had decided to operate a permanent service together.

Considering that the International Red Cross Audio-Visual Centre was an important means for the whole Red Cross movement to carry out its information and dissemination objectives, the Manila Conference encouraged the ICRC and the League to "continue their joint efforts to make known to the public at large the nature and scope of the Red Cross activities at international level, and to support the National Societies in their information programmes" (Resolution XVI).

The International Red Cross Audio-Visual Centre, set up at League headquarters in Geneva with a staff of six persons, is responsible for producing, distributing, registering, classifying and storing a wide range of audio-visual material concerning the history and activities of the Red Cross, such as: video films; 8, 16 and 35 mm films; photos; slides; multivision material; and documents for exhibitions. Its photo library now has 40,000 photos and 20,000 slides. Since its official inauguration, the Centre has produced three video films, with 46 copies of each, and made more than 11,000 photo enlargements in black and white and colour, as well as 17,000 reproductions of slides.

Throughout the year, there was also active co-operation between the ICRC and the League in other fields of information, notably on the occasion of technical meetings organized for the benefit of persons responsible for information and public relations for the National Societies. The two institutions also joined in putting out an illustrated publication on Red Cross action in Africa, which was distributed at the United Nations Conference on refugees in Africa.

#### Information from the field

Several reportages designed to gain support for humanitarian activities of the ICRC were carried out at critical points around the world, such as South-East Asia, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan and Lebanon. These provided material for nine press dossiers. A film reportage was also made of the first repatriation operation of wounded prisoners of war of the Iraq-Iran conflict.

In addition to these specific actions, the Press and Information Division continued its efforts to make known and ensure respect for Red Cross principles.

In El Salvador, the information programme launched on 6 November 1980, designed to reach combatants and the general population, was adapted to meet the needs arising from intensification of violence in the country. Working both through the media and by direct contact, the campaign was concerned with describing and explaining, in the most concrete and simple way possible, the elementary rules of humanity. Lectures were given to combatants, posters were distributed, radio spots were broadcast and films distributed. The El Salvador delegation in addition, on many occasions, sought to explain clearly to the public the criteria for its activities, through articles and advertisements, stressing the apolitical character of the ICRC.

In Thailand, information work was largely focused upon contacts with the media interested in developments arising from the protection and assistance action along the Cambodia-Thailand border. In view of the reduced size of the staff carrying out this work, publication of the *Red Cross Times*, an internal liaison bulletin for the delegation, was discontinued in March.

In Zaire, an information and dissemination campaign was launched at the end of the year. Intended, in its initial phase, for the population of Kinshasa, the capital, this campaign revolves about a series of popular stories in which the birth of the Red Cross and various episodes in the evolution of the ICRC are recounted. The presentation of these tales, which will eventually be given an audio-visual form, started in December and will continue in 1982.

#### Information from headquarters

The periodical publications of the ICRC continued their regular appearance in 1981: the *ICRC Bulletin* each month in four languages (English, French, German and Spanish) and the *International Review of the Red Cross* every two months (see below). In addition, apart from the *Annual Report* which appeared in five languages, an interim report covering the first half year was issued for the Manila Conference.

Two brochures were published in October. The first, *Kampuchea, Back from the Brink*, reported on 15 months of joint ICRC-UNICEF action in Kampuchea and Thailand. This was illustrated with photos and contained a number of statistical tables. It was published in an edition of 30,000 copies (20 000 in English and 10,000 in French) and was widely distributed both by UNICEF and the ICRC, being well received everywhere. The second brochure, *The ICRC in Africa* was a follow-up to a publication with the same title issued in 1978 and presented through pictures, text and figures the activities of the ICRC in fourteen African countries. It was published in English, French and Spanish, with a total of 12,000 copies. A four-language folder was also published on the subject of the Central Tracing Agency.

With respect to relations with the media, two major events took place:

The first of these resulted from an offer to the ICRC by Radio Suisse Romande (RSR) to be present on the air throughout a full day, on 26 May. The resulting day-long programme featured three reports by RSR journalists in Lebanon, El Salvador and Thailand. Various other ICRC activities were presented through brief interviews broadcast live from the institution's headquarters, which was also the setting for a dialogue between the President of the ICRC and the listeners.

The second event was an evening devoted to the ICRC on the magazine programme *Temps Présent* of Télévision Suisse Romande on 10 December. This revolved about two reports, one filmed in Nicaraguan prisons and the other in Uganda. The broadcast was also the occasion for a discussion of various permanent and newly arising concerns of the ICRC.

Another example of media interest was the publication by *Reader's Digest*, in April, of a six-page article on the work of ICRC delegates. First published in the French edition of the magazine, the article was reprinted in ten editions in other languages.

As part of its public relations work in Switzerland, the Division arranged lectures and exhibitions in Basel, Zurich, Bulle and Geneva.

**RADIO BROADCASTS.** — With the technical co-operation of the Swiss PTT administration and the international service of Swiss Radio, the ICRC's Red Cross Broadcasting Service (RCBS) continued to broadcast monthly programmes in five languages (English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic) on the frequency of 7210 kHz. It also produced twelve programmes in Portuguese for broadcast by stations in African countries speaking that language.

The RCBS programmes are designed to inform the public as widely as possible of the activities of the ICRC. They are also intended to create greater awareness of the role of the League of Red Cross Societies as co-ordinator of relief in the event of natural catastrophes and to make known the tasks of National Societies as auxiliaries of their governments in relief, medical assistance and social welfare.

A special effort was made in 1981 to stimulate more regular listening to the RCBS broadcasts. Contacts were multiplied with various associations of listeners and with the heads of radio stations. A contest was organized to attract listeners, which made possible a closer contact with them.

Programmes broadcast during the year included news bulletins, interviews and reports from the field (notably from Thailand, El Salvador, Lebanon and Pakistan) concerning various aspects of ICRC activities in relation to conflicts. Broadcasts were also devoted to the International Red Cross Conference at Manila in November.

**VISITORS TO THE ICRC** — During 1981, the ICRC welcomed an average of 550 visitors a month to its headquarters. Coming from every part of the world, in groups or individually, more than 6,700 persons, a quarter of whom belonged to the Red Cross movement, followed a programme which included a talk on the activities of the ICRC, a film and a visit to the Central Tracing Agency.

**MISSIONS** — Permanent staff members of the division and information delegates went on missions and made reports on all five continents. The head of the division, among other missions, represented the ICRC at the ninth Festival of Red Cross and Health Films at Varna, Bulgaria. The information bureaux of the League and the ICRC, as on previous occasions, set up and operated the information service at the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference at Manila.

## International Review of the Red Cross

In 1981, the *International Review of the Red Cross*, the official organ of the International Red Cross and the only review dealing with Red Cross fundamentals, was published every two months in three main editions, English, French and Spanish, each of about 60 pages, with an abridged version in German, ranging from 16 to 20 pages.

Along with contributions by various authors on subjects relating to international humanitarian law ("A new step forward in international law: prohibitions and restrictions on the use of certain conventional weapons", "Language rights in international humanitarian law"), the *Review* published articles of more general interest to the Red Cross ("International solidarity and protection of political detainees", "Red Cross assistance and protection"). It also published the Resolutions and Decisions of the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference and those of the Council of Delegates, both of which met at Manila in October and November. The *Review* reprinted André Durand's work, *The International Committee of the Red Cross* in the original French and also translated and published it in the English and Spanish editions. Other articles dealt specifically with the ICRC and its activities, such as "Action by the ICRC in the event of breaches of international humanitarian law" (and, on a related theme, the text of a "Letter from the ICRC to the UN concerning an inquiry into the alleged use of chemical weapons"), and "The ICRC and traditional Khmer medicine", describing an instance of practical co-operation in the field between western doctors and traditional healers. Separate reprints were made of some of these articles and a number of them were reproduced by other publications.

In addition, the *Review* published texts from the United Nations Conference on Prohibitions or Restrictions of Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects, including The Final Act, the Convention, Protocols I, II and III and the Resolution on small-calibre weapons. The *Review* provided regular summaries on the current activities of the ICRC and its delegations throughout the world and on work of the ICRC, the League and the National Societies for the dissemination of international humanitarian law. It announced ratifications and accessions by States to the Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Protocols; it gave notification of recognition by the ICRC of new Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and reported the centenaries of the National Red Cross Societies of Hungary and the United States. It published reviews of recent books on international humanitarian law and on the Red Cross.

In all this, the *Review* attempted at all times to discharge its function as the organ for liaison between the members of the International Red Cross and as a source of general information for them.