

# Lebanon

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# I. OPERATIONS

## Lebanon

The year 1976 was marked by intensification of the civil war in Lebanon, the chief features of which were street fighting, heavy and indiscriminate shelling, especially in Beirut and Tripoli, and violent but localized battles elsewhere. This situation continued until October, when the intervention of the Arab Peace-Keeping Forces (FAD) put an end to the fighting, though not all the humanitarian problems were solved.

Another feature of this war was the multiplicity of paramilitary groups and armed groups, which meant that humanitarian principles often received scant respect, or were completely ignored: hostages were taken, summary executions carried out and, particularly during the first part of the year, the protective emblems of the red cross and the red crescent were not respected.

The ICRC was hampered by the very nature of the events themselves, and it was obliged to use all its powers of persuasion to induce the various armed groups to make their fighting men respect the elementary principles of humanity.

Simultaneously with this fundamental duty, requiring repeated efforts, the ICRC gradually set up an organization which enabled it to provide protection and help, without discrimination, to victims on all sides of the conflict. To obtain access to the various zones and parties to the conflict it established, in addition to its delegation in West Beirut, sub-delegations at Jounieh, Tripoli and Baalbeck.

It should be noted that this ICRC action had the backing of the Red Cross movement as a whole. It would have been impossible without the material, money and manpower it provided.

At the end of the year, the ICRC had some sixty people—delegates, other staff from Geneva, and medical personnel supplied by the Nordic National Societies (see p. 7)—at work in Lebanon, and 120 locally recruited employees.

### Protection

For the reasons noted above, the ICRC had great difficulties in discharging its protective mission. This was carried out both for combatant and civilian prisoners and for people in isolated communities in hostile territory.

**Prisoners.** — From the outset of hostilities, the ICRC intervened persistently with the political and military leaders of the various parties and armed groups in Lebanon to remind them of their obligation to treat prisoners in conformity with the spirit of the Geneva Conventions.

In early June, following the arrival of Syrian troops in Lebanon, the ICRC made new approaches to the Syrian authorities and to the different armed groups.

It obtained authorization from the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (OLP) and the Arab Army of Lebanon (AAL) to visit all members of the Syrian armed forces captured in the fighting. Accordingly, in three visits on 14, 16 and 21 June at Beirut and Saida, ICRC delegates saw 91 Syrian military prisoners. These were liberated and repatriated under the terms of an agreement reached through the Arab League which provided, among other things, for the liberation of all prisoners.

On 14 August at Antélias, east of Beirut, the delegates gained access to ten prisoners in the hands of the Phalangists, the first of a number of visits to Lebanese and Palestinian detainees held by various political parties and armed groups. From then until November, about 120 prisoners in the hands of ten different groups were visited in twelve places of detention in the eastern and western suburbs of Beirut, at Antélias, on the mountain of Chouf, Saida, Tripoli, Hasbaya and Kleya, in the south. During this time, most of these prisoners were liberated under the auspices of the ICRC or at its request.

Following the exchange on 29 November at Beirut of 34 persons detained by different parties, all the parties and armed groups said that they had no more prisoners, except for the Lebanese forces at Kleya. At the end of 1976, the latter forces still held 4 persons, who were regularly visited by the ICRC, which continued its efforts to obtain their liberation.

At the end of October, pursuant to agreements reached at Arab summit meetings in Riyadh and Cairo to put an end to the civil war, the Arab Peace-Keeping Forces intervened in Lebanon. In its pacification activities, this force took various measures for public order, including arrests.

To seek answers to requests by families for news about arrested persons and obtain permission to visit them and carry out its traditional protective activities, the ICRC intervened at the highest level with the Lebanese and Syrian authorities. At the end of the year, it had received no reply to its inquiries.

**Isolated communities.** — In March, the ICRC sent two mobile medical teams, each comprising a doctor, a nurse and a delegate, into the Bekaa and Akkar regions. Their responsibility was to assure, through regular visits, protection and assistance to Muslim and Christian minorities isolated in hostile territory. These teams, the number of which was subsequently increased and whose activities were gradually extended to cover the whole of Lebanon, often constituted the only link between separated families, especially by its transmission of messages.

### Medical assistance

Intensification of the fighting profoundly disturbed the Lebanese medical infrastructure which, although well developed, gradually became disorganized, especially in the provinces, and was no longer able to meet the needs of the population.

From the beginning of the year, two major problems arose: the hospitals were often filled to capacity and could no longer take in the successive waves of wounded persons sent to them;



the slowing up and eventual cessation of foreign trade, together with the erosion of the administration of health services, produced virtual paralysis of the supply system for hospitals and dispensaries.

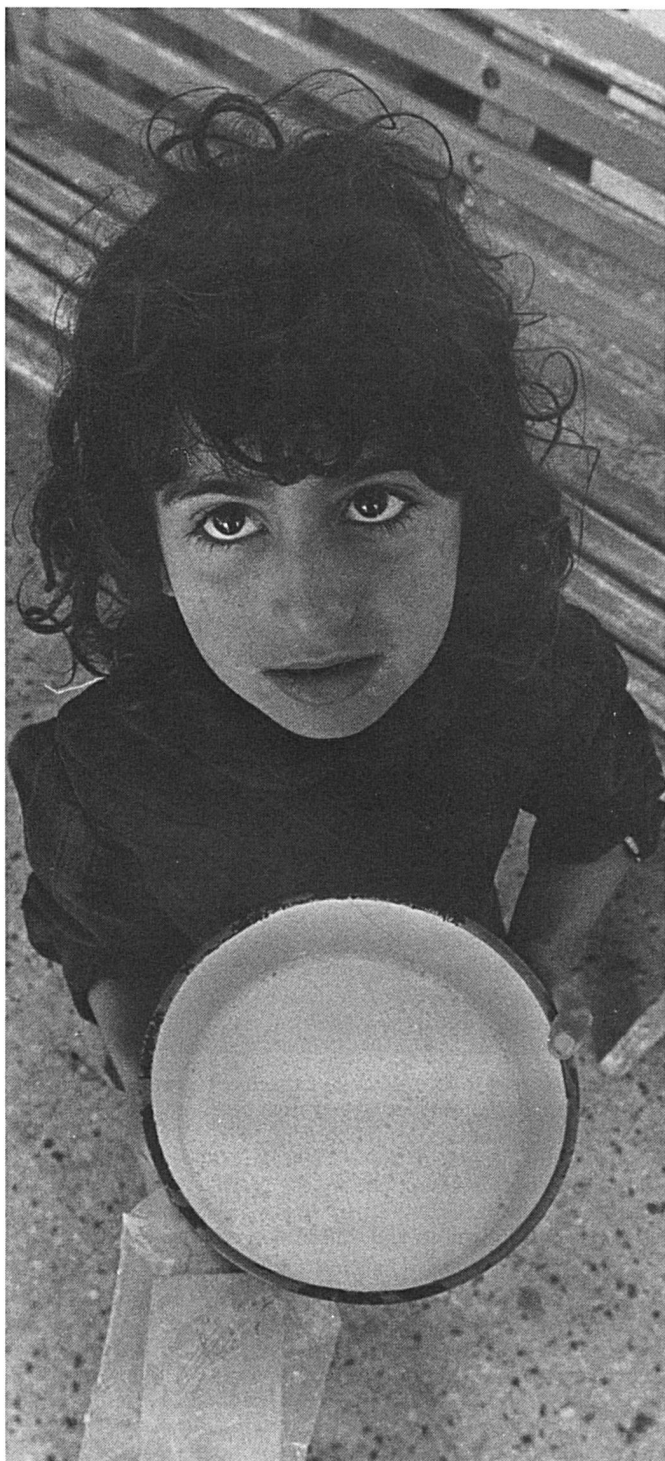
***The field hospital.*** — To help overcome partly the first problem, the ICRC set up a field hospital in the southern outskirts of Beirut where the need was particularly acute.

This hospital, opened on 13 February, supplied and completely equipped for wartime surgery by the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish National Societies, was initially installed in tents. When intense fighting developed in its vicinity in mid-June, it had to be transferred for safety to a building near the office of the delegation in west Beirut. Thereafter, it worked

continuously and to its maximum capacity. The volume of work, in terms of the number of operations, corresponded to that of a 150-bed surgical service, making it one of the largest hospitals in the sector. Each of the successive medico-surgical teams staffing the hospital, supplied by the Nordic National Societies mentioned above, consisted of about 15 doctors and nurses, plus some 40 Lebanese and Palestinian employees.

With the cessation of fighting, the ICRC decided to close the hospital on 11 December, but to keep it in a state of readiness for any eventuality.

From 13 February to 11 December, the medico-surgical teams carried out 635 major operations and 3,266 minor operations and gave 2,962 physiotherapy sessions. A total of 7,993 hospital days were provided. In addition to the war wounded, many sick persons were treated at the hospital dispensary—a



total of 24,436 consultations—most of the patients being displaced persons.

**Mobile medical teams.** — The two teams sent in March into the Bekaa and Akkar regions were responsible for supplying dispensaries with medicines and caring for the sick in villages without doctors.

The Akkar team was able to work normally, making daily visits to various localities. The Bekaa team, however, had to be withdrawn after a few weeks due to non-respect for the emblem by armed groups which endangered the lives of the team. It was able to resume activity at the end of August.

**Supplies to hospitals and dispensaries.** — Most of the hospitals and dispensaries, cut off from all sources of supply, had to cope with a situation demanding extra efforts because of the stream of wounded.

At first, the ICRC did its best to help the hospitals by providing them with emergency drugs and supplies. Three medical committees were formed, comprising the principal hospitals of West Beirut, East Beirut and Tripoli, to arrange a system for the supply and allocation of drugs in the best way among the various establishments.

At a later stage, it was necessary to revive medical facilities in the rural areas. Medical delegates of the ICRC travelled all over the country, visiting the dispensaries and first-aid posts, checking and replenishing their supplies. These operations were carried out in collaboration with the local officials of the Lebanese Red Cross, the "Palestinian Red Crescent" and humanitarian organizations run under government or private auspices.

At the end of 1976, three teams, in the charge of a doctor responsible for co-ordination, and each consisting of one doctor and one nurse, continued this work throughout the country, from their bases in Beirut, Jounieh and Tripoli. The total value of medicines and medical supplies provided by the ICRC in 1976 amounted to more than 10.7 million Swiss francs.

The ICRC, along with the three medical committees, also took part in organizing a vaccination campaign, vaccines being provided by the WHO.

A sanitary engineer and a technician from the WHO, working with the ICRC medical teams, tested the water supplies in the areas of the country most affected by the fighting.

**War casualties.** — Many persons having lost limbs as a consequence of injuries sustained in the war, the ICRC decided to set up several rehabilitation projects which could subsequently be taken over by the National Societies, governments or other organizations. For this purpose it sent out a prosthetist who surveyed the situation during the months of November and December. He also found a workshop in Beirut that had been making prostheses and started it operating again: by the end of the year it had equipped several injured people.



The ICRC also transferred twenty-five young people who had been disabled in the fighting to European countries (Bulgaria, USSR and Hungary) which had offered to nurse them.

**Tel al-Zaatar.** — One operation carried out to assist the wounded was particularly hazardous. For several weeks, the redoubt of Tel al-Zaatar, in Beirut, had been the scene of fierce fighting and there were many victims. The injured within could not be treated, due to the absence of proper facilities. The only solution, therefore, was to bring them out.

In order to accomplish this, the ICRC, on 5 July, began a series of urgent appeals to all parties, imploring them to conclude a cease-fire so that the evacuation could be carried out.

After numerous difficulties and long negotiations, three operations were carried out on 3, 4 and 6 August. Convoys composed of about a dozen trucks and ambulances, with a dozen ICRC delegates and about 25 ambulance staff of the Lebanese Red Cross, managed to evacuate a total of 408 wounded persons.

Grave incidents, however, took place during the third operation. As the ICRC convoy arrived the civilian inhabitants being seized by panic swarmed all over the vehicles, while snipers fired on the wounded as they lay on stretchers.

In these circumstances, the ICRC decided to halt the evacuation of wounded and it informed the parties that the only truly humane solution for the problem of the besieged people of Tel al-Zaatar was to evacuate the entire civilian population of the redoubt.

On 12 August, Tel al-Zaatar was taken by the besieging forces before any evacuation agreement had been reached between the parties concerned. With an improvised convoy and in conditions of the utmost difficulty—there was no cease-fire—the ICRC delegates succeeded in evacuating a thousand people by truck, while several thousand more escaped across the demarcation line.

## Relief

Estimated at 150,000 in May, the number of displaced persons and other war victims in need of material aid increased greatly from July onwards, because of the ferocious fighting that went on between the forces occupying what were known as the "traditional" fronts, in Beirut and its suburbs and in other areas of the country.

From the beginning of the year, the ICRC concerned itself with the plight of these people and distributed relief to them. By October their ranks, according to a survey, had swollen to 1,350,000. Of this total 780,000 were not in receipt of aid from any organization but the ICRC, which provided them with relief in the form of food, blankets, clothes and kitchen utensils.

**Logistic problems.** — It is impossible to discuss the ICRC's action in supplying material assistance without referring to the logistic problems, not only with regard to dispatch and reception of the supplies, but also their distribution.

In the first three months of 1976, dispatch proved no problem, since the city of Beirut had a regular air service. But the distribution and sharing of the relief supplies quickly encountered the obstacle presented by the "front line" which cut Beirut in two.

By mid-March it had in fact become impossible to bring food supplies to the eastern sector of the city, beyond the zone held by the Palestinian-Progressive coalition and containing the airport. The ICRC then established a sub-delegation at Jounieh and decided to use Cyprus as an advance base from which to dispatch by sea the relief supplies intended for the sector held by the conservative forces. The first consignment, consisting of 11 tons of medical equipment, left Limassol for Jounieh on 31 March.

From then on, consignments of relief supplies went by air to Beirut and by boat to Jounieh. The sub-delegation opened in Tripoli was supplied from Syria.

The closure of the Beirut airport at the beginning of June caused the ICRC to undertake negotiations to obtain, from all the parties involved, permission to land a specially chartered aircraft marked with the red cross emblem. This aircraft, a DC-6, made its first flight from Larnaca to Beirut on 22 June, with 10 tons of medicines. Forty flights of this kind were made by 12 August, enabling about 420 tons of medical supplies and foodstuffs to be delivered to Beirut.

During the same period, 13 consignments of relief supplies sent by sea to Jounieh and one to Tripoli amounted to 323 tons.

As minimum safety conditions were no longer guaranteed, the ICRC was forced to stop its flights on 12 August. Relief continued to come in by sea, the ICRC having chartered a ship, the MS Kalliopi. This vessel, flying the Red Cross flag, entered the port of Jounieh for the first time on 23 August 1976. Based on Limassol, the ship ferried cargoes continuously between Cyprus and the ports of Tripoli, Jounieh, Tyre and, after 24 December 1976, Beirut. By the end of the year, the Kalliopi had made 13 voyages, carrying a total of 3,988 tons of ICRC relief supplies to Lebanon.

As the only organization covering the whole of the country, the ICRC, in effect, was the channel for the humanitarian aid provided by the international community for all the victims of the conflict in Lebanon.

Between 1 January and 31 December 1976, the ICRC sent to Lebanon 5,378 tons of relief supplies—540 tons of drugs and medical supplies, 4,308 tons of food and 530 tons of blankets, clothing and other aid—to a total value of 20.4 million Swiss francs.

At the end of the year, twenty ICRC delegates, with the help of employees recruited locally, were responsible for receiving and distributing the relief. The Lebanese Red Cross and the "Palestinian Red Crescent" also assisted with these operations.

## Search for missing persons

In the first three months of 1976, the activities of the Central Tracing Agency consisted largely in providing a link between

Lebanese families and their relatives in other countries. The departure of thousands of persons as a result of the war gave rise to numerous requests for news.

Later, the intensification of the fighting and the difficulties in crossing the demarcation lines caused an increase in the number of inquiries received from various regions of Lebanon itself. It became necessary for the ICRC to strengthen the tracing facilities by sending experts from the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva. A description of the operations and the statistics of work performed are given on page 29 of this Report. The total number of messages transmitted was 22,770, and the number of inquiries set on foot was 17,800.

In reuniting families, the ICRC transferred from one zone to another 64 persons, namely wounded, sick, children, expectant mothers, and persons over sixty years of age.

## **Financing of the operation**

The ICRC's operation in Lebanon would have been impossible without the confidence and generous material assistance of numerous governments, National Societies, international organizations and individuals.

At the end of 1976, the donations received by the ICRC, as a result of the two appeals for funds made in May and October, amounted to almost 30 million Swiss francs in cash, 24 million in kind and 1.3 million in services (free transport, payment of expenses of medical teams supplied by National Societies). The list of donors of cash appears on page 57.

List of donors of gifts in kind for the ICRC relief operation in Lebanon in 1976:

### **List of donors who sent gifts in kind to the ICRC's Lebanon relief programme in 1976:**

#### **National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

**Afghanistan, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, German Democratic Republic, Germany (Federal Republic of), Hungary, India, Italy, Kuwait, Libya, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.**

#### **Governments**

**Australia, Belgium, Iraq, Norway, Qatar, Switzerland, United States.**

#### **Others donors**

**Twenty-nine organizations, including Caritas, EEC, IUCW, OXFAM, Save the Children Fund, Seventh-Day Adventist World Service, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, WCC, WHO; also the civilian population of the West Bank, various Palestinian associations and a number of private firms.**