

Greek children : joint report of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to the Secretary General of the United Nations

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ANNEX

GREEK CHILDREN

Joint Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

On September 18, 1950, the International Committee and the League submitted the following Report on their joint efforts.

Sir,

On 11 January, 1949, you requested the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to establish the necessary contacts, on the one hand, with the Greek Government and Red Cross, and, on the other, with the Government and National Red Cross Societies of the countries in which Greek children resided, to examine the means of implementing the Resolution adopted on 27 November 1948, by the General Assembly of the United Nations, recommending the return of these children to Greece.

This Resolution reads as follows :

“ THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

RECOMMENDS the return to Greece of Greek children at present away from their homes, when the children, their father or mother or, in his or her absence, their closest relatives, express a wish to that effect ;

INVITES all the Members of the United Nations and other States on whose territory these children are to be found to take the necessary measures for implementation of the present recommendation ;

INSTRUCTS the Secretary-General to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to organize and ensure liaison with the National Red Cross organizations of the States concerned, with a view to empowering the National Red Cross organizations to adopt mea-

asures in the respective countries for implementing the present recommendation."

We accepted this mission and immediately took steps which were the subject of a first general Report addressed to you on October 5, 1949, after several preliminary communications.

Basing itself particularly on the facts given in this Report, the General Assembly of the United Nations, on November 18, 1949, adopted a new resolution on the repatriation of displaced Greek children.

" THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NOTING the report submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies on the question of the repatriation of Greek children (A/1014) and expressing warm appreciation of the efforts made by the two International Red Cross organizations to facilitate the implementation of General Assembly Resolution 193 (III) C ;

NOTING that the Greek children have not as yet been returned to their homes in accordance with the resolution of the General Assembly, and recognizing the necessity of further efforts for the full implementation of this resolution ;

- (1) INSTRUCTS the Secretary-General to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to continue their efforts in this humanitarian cause, and to lend them all appropriate assistance in carrying out their task ;
- (2) URGES all the members of the United Nations, and other States harbouring the Greek children, to make all necessary arrangements, in consultation and cooperation with the International Red Cross organizations, for the early return to their homes of the children, in accordance with the aforementioned resolution ;
- (3) INVITES the International Red Cross organizations to report to the Secretary-General, for the information of United Nations members, on the progress being made in the implementation of the present resolution."

We concluded our first general Report by expressing regret that, notwithstanding the continued efforts of our two organizations, it had, by October 5, 1949, not proved possible to achieve better practical results.

No Greek child had yet been repatriated.

We had been able to delegate joint study missions to Bulgaria,

Greece, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Despite our repeated requests, however, we had failed to secure authorization for our representatives to visit Hungary and Rumania.

In spite of the steps we had taken, not one of the reception countries had furnished us with the list of the Greek children found on its territory, which we wished to compare with the list of children claimed by their families in Greece.

The Czechoslovak Red Cross had communicated to us the names of 138 children residing in Czechoslovakia, whom it had been able to identify from the first list of children claimed, which we had furnished in the month of August. The Bulgarian, Hungarian, Rumanian and Yugoslav Red Cross Societies, however, had not yet been in a position to inform us as to the result of the examination of our first list, which we had requested of them. The Albanian Red Cross had informed us that there were no more Greek children in Albania. The Polish Red Cross, with which we had made contact on the subject of Greek children allegedly transferred to Poland, had not yet given us any reply.

"Our two organizations remain prepared to afford their fullest cooperation, wherever it may be judged necessary, in order to hasten the solution of this problem", we said in concluding our first general Report; and added: "All the Red Cross organizations concerned, both national and international, show that they are convinced of the importance of finding a solution consistent with humanitarian principles. The International Committee and the League therefore retain the hope that, under the Resolution of November 27, 1948, and any others which might be adopted on this subject by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Greek children away from their homes who may express the wish, and those who are claimed by their parents, may in the near future return to their country".

At the beginning of this year no appreciable progress had been made since October 5; we therefore invited the Greek Red Cross and the Red Cross Societies of the reception countries to send representatives to a meeting at Geneva, where the entire problem of the Greek children might be reviewed, from a humanitarian standpoint, and each party would have an opportunity of freely stating its views. We hoped that it would thus finally prove possible to discover a solution whereby the children claimed could be speedily repatriated.

The Greek Red Cross alone was represented at this meeting, which was held on March 9 and 10, 1950.

The Hungarian and Polish Red Cross did not reply to our invitation. The Bulgarian, Rumanian and Czechoslovak Societies declined it: the first for reasons connected with the Greek and Yugoslav Red Cross, the second on the grounds that it had not yet completed the examination of our lists, and the third asserting that it had had occasion to express its point of view to the delegate whom we had sent to Prague

in February 1949. As regards the Yugoslav Red Cross, it was finally not represented at the proposed meeting, although it had in principle agreed to attend.

Resolved nevertheless to continue our efforts, we approached, at the end of March, the Red Cross Societies of the reception countries to ascertain what conditions they themselves and their authorities considered necessary for the completion of repatriation at the earliest possible date. The Czechoslovak Red Cross, to which we had delegated a representative, in February 1950, to organize the repatriation of 138 identified children, asked for certain preliminary safeguards from our two organizations (certificates of civil status, relationship, etc., for each child).

We did not wish to preclude the possibility of likewise adapting our working methods to the particular requirements of the other reception countries.

We are compelled to say that the practical results achieved through these efforts to this day have been negligible.

During the last meeting (May 1950) of the Executive Committee of the League, the Yugoslav Red Cross delegate stated that, for its part, her Society would comply with the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations concerning the repatriation of the displaced Greek children. She reported the number of Greek children in Yugoslavia and the number of those who lived in that country with their own families and who, for that reason, were not to be repatriated.

The Greek Minister at Berne, in an interview with the Yugoslav Red Cross delegate, conveyed to her a proposal from the Greek Government, that the International Red Cross be requested to send to Yugoslavia a mission for the purpose of checking the figures reported to the Executive Committee of the League. This proposal, which was noted by the delegate of the Yugoslav Red Cross, was renewed by the Greek Government, according to information received from that Government, in the course of talks held in Athens with the Chargé d'Affaires of Yugoslavia in Greece. The Greek authorities informed us that this suggestion had hitherto elicited no response.

The Yugoslav Red Cross reported, in June, the names of 63 children living in Yugoslavia, whom it had been possible to identify on our lists. At the same time, it communicated its proposals on the practical organization of the repatriation. However, it set forth certain conditions preliminary to repatriation, and asked for guarantees, particularly on the identity of the children and their relationship to the persons whose claims we had transmitted. This communication has been conveyed to the Greek Red Cross, and we now await transmission by the Greek Government of the documents demanded by the Yugoslav Red Cross.

On the other hand, a group of seventeen children left Yugoslavia, in June, to join their parents living in Australia, as a result of

negotiations between the Australian Government and the Yugoslav authorities.

None of the children identified in Czechoslovakia have yet been repatriated. In response to a request from the Czechoslovak Red Cross, we sent to Greece, in May this year, two delegates, who, during several weeks of travel, made contact with the persons who had signed requests for repatriation presented on behalf of 138 children identified in Czechoslovakia. They also collected the certificates of identity and relationship demanded by that Society. We had intended to instruct representatives from our two organizations to take these documents to Prague and to supply the Czechoslovak Red Cross with the comments that were desirable in view of the circumstances in which they had been collected. On two occasions we suggested this procedure to the Czechoslovak Red Cross, which did not, however, agree. Finally, at the express request of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, which considered that an examination of these documents by its own services prior to the visit of our delegates would allow speedier repatriation of the identified children, we forwarded these documents to the Czechoslovak Red Cross by mail at the beginning of August. The Czechoslovak Red Cross has not yet acquainted us with the result of its survey.

Moreover, we have received no reply to the request for visas made to the Czechoslovak authorities on June 26, on behalf of the delegates to visit the Czechoslovak Red Cross, for the purpose of supplying all the requisite explanations regarding these documents and of organizing, with the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the repatriation of the identified children.

The Bulgarian Red Cross has not yet informed us of the result of its examination of our lists. We have received no further communication from that Society since its telegram of June 30, following which we renewed our proposal to send a delegate to Bulgaria to consider, in conjunction with its services, the difficulties which it said it had encountered, and to assist it in the work of identification. Nor have we received any response to the request for a visa which we made on behalf of this representative, as far back as April, and again in July last.

On June 29, the Rumanian Red Cross informed us that, in its opinion, before any practical measures would be adopted in view of organizing the repatriation of the displaced Greek children, a solution must be found for the problem of the refugees and homeless children in Greece.

As this Society, too, appeared not to have concluded its examination of our lists and to have encountered certain difficulties, we likewise suggested, on July 14, that it should receive a delegate from our two organizations. We have had no reply to this proposal.

From the Hungarian Red Cross we have had no answer to any of our communications since September 21, 1949.

The Polish Red Cross, in November, 1949, denied a report to the effect that Greek children had been transferred to Poland. Nevertheless, we were informed, in May last, that a certain number of Greek children were to be found on Polish territory.

Our attention has also been drawn to a number of displaced Greek children living on the territory of the German Democratic Republic. No information has been supplied to us on this subject, either by the responsible authorities in Germany, or by the countries from which these children are said to have been transferred.

Such, in brief, is the problem as it stands today.

We attach a complete chronological statement of the steps undertaken since January 11, 1949, and of their results.

The Presidents of our two organizations cabled to you, on June 9 last, on the problem of the displaced Greek children, and we quote the following passage :

... " The International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies feel that their endeavours must be assisted by the United Nations. This is especially true since efforts of the Committee and the League to have the Red Cross Societies of the countries harbouring the children to cooperate in a conference called in Geneva on March 9 were not successful.

" We are of the opinion that only the Governments concerned can bring about a prompt solution of this whole problem. We urge that whatever action you consider most appropriate be now taken by you with the Governments concerned. We urge this because the Red Cross firmly believes it to be a principle of natural law, endorsed by the peoples of the world, that children belong with their parents, and the Red Cross will therefore continue to act in the spirit of the Assembly's resolution.

" We sincerely deplore that, unless progress can be speeded up, the report to the United Nations Assembly in September would have to show that the task entrusted by unanimous vote of the Assembly to the International Red Cross, has been impossible of fulfilment, in spite of all efforts by the Committee and the League.

(signed) Paul RUEGGER
Basil O'CONNOR

As can be seen, the situation has not altered since June 9 ; indeed, it has not improved since October 5, 1949.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies today again note that none of the displaced Greek children, claimed by their parents in Greece, have been repatriated.

Seventeen children only have been able to join their relatives in Australia.

The Committee and the League feel that they have done everything in their power and mobilised all the resources at their disposal to give effect, as completely and rapidly as possible, to the two resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations concerning the repatriation of the displaced Greek children.

Summing up, the principal steps undertaken by the two international Red Cross organizations have been the following :

1. — The International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies, at the beginning of the operation, aimed at a preliminary and general survey of the problem by establishing contact, through joint missions, with the Greek Government and Red Cross, and with the Governments and Red Cross Societies of the receiving countries. These missions were able to visit Greece, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Jugoslavia. The Hungarian Red Cross stated that it would welcome representatives of the International Committee and of the League. The Hungarian authorities did not, however, reply to requests for visas, any more than did the Rumanian and Albanian authorities.

2. — The International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies subsequently, on several occasions, asked the Red Cross Societies of the receiving countries for informative reports, in which they would have been happy to find an expression of the opinion of these Societies, together with practical suggestions. This step met with no response. Yet the Hungarian Red Cross had, in March 1949, announced that it would furnish a documentary statement.

3. — In order to ascertain the whereabouts of each one of the children who are claimed, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies asked the receiving countries to supply a list of the displaced Greek children living on their territory, which was to be compared with the demands for repatriation presented by parents. None of the receiving countries has sent such a list to Geneva. The Bulgarian and Czechoslovak Red Cross Societies had, nevertheless, in March 1949, given the delegates of the International Committee and of the League an assurance that they would send these documents in the shortest possible time.

4. — The International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies have, since August 1949, furnished to the Red Cross Societies of the receiving countries four lists of children claimed, comprising an approximate total of 9,300 names, a figure distinctly smaller than that of 28,000 which had been declared to represent the total number of displaced children. They requested these Societies to inform them, which of the children mentioned in the documents were found on the territory of their countries.

The Bulgarian, Hungarian and Rumanian Red Cross Societies have not communicated the final results of their examination to Geneva. Nevertheless, the two former Societies had assured the Committee and League that they would do this in the shortest possible time. With a view to assisting these three Societies in their technical work, the two international Red Cross organizations proposed to send representatives particularly versed in the matter. There was no answer to this proposal.

The Czechoslovak Red Cross identified 138 names on the first of the four lists. It did not state whether it had studied the three other lists. The names of the 138 children identified were communicated in September, 1949. None of the children have been repatriated up to the present, although the Czechoslovak Red Cross has received from the Committee and the League all the additional guarantees requested in February, 1950, from the Delegate sent to organize the rapatriation of these children.

The Yugoslav Red Cross identified 63 children on these lists. Here, again, repatriation has not yet been effected, the Yugoslav Red Cross having likewise stipulated several preliminary conditions.

5. — Hoping that a general discussion would make it possible to find a solution which had not been achieved through private negotiations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies finally endeavoured to assemble representatives from all the Red Cross Societies concerned at a meeting where they would have had an opportunity of freely expressing their views on the problem and advancing practical suggestions. It will be recalled that not one of the Red Cross Societies of the reception countries was represented at the meeting called at Geneva on March 9 and 10, 1950.

Deeply regretting that better practical results have not hitherto been secured despite the steps they have repeatedly undertaken, the International Committee and the League realise that they are now unable to pursue, through their own channels, the general execution of their mission.

Without wishing to judge the causes of a situation which it is not in their power to alter, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies are obliged to stress the fact that they must contemplate renouncing the mandate which they had accepted from the United Nations, unless the United Nations and the countries concerned with the problem of the displaced Greek children afford them the cooperation which is essential in the discharge of their task—a cooperation which the General Assembly of the United Nations had provided for in point 2 of its Resolution of November 18, 1949, which to this day has unfortunately not been put into practice.