

Indo-China

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PART II

The second part of this Report deals with the operations of the ICRC in countries where fresh conflicts broke out after the ending of the second World War : Indo-China, Indonesia, India and Pakistan, Paraguay, Greece and Palestine.

Palestine is dealt with in considerably greater detail than the other areas because the international conflict there and the multiplicity and importance of the problems raised, called for the uninterrupted attention, in many forms, of the welfare organisations.

I. Indo-China

The conflict which started at the end of 1946 in Indo-China continued throughout the following months. The Delegate appointed by the ICRC to Indo-China in March 1947, endeavoured to preserve contact with the French authorities and the French Red Cross, on the one hand, and the adverse party and its Red Cross organisation, on the other.

In July 1947, after repeated demands by the Delegate for the release of French internees, an agreement in principle was reached; but its application unfortunately proved impossible. At a meeting which took place between the fighting lines on July 18, 1947, with representatives of the Vietnam Red Cross organisation, the Delegate exchanged large quantities of mail and handed

over 1,500 kilos of miscellaneous supplies and 58,000 piastres, for French military and civilian prisoners.

The Delegate shortly afterwards returned to Geneva and his work was taken over by his colleague for South-East Asia, M. Aeschliman. The latter was held up by urgent business in Indonesia and could not reach Indo-China before December. He then found that it was impossible to make fresh contact with the Vietmin. His work had thus to be confined to preparing a subsequent mission and a medical relief scheme, Vietnamese nationals in France having supplied funds for the Vietnam Red Cross organisation.

In January, 1948, the Delegate travelled to Siam, to make contact in Bangkok with Vietnam representatives for South-East Asia. He discussed with them means of procuring medical relief supplies for the Vietnam Red Cross organisation. He again asked for the immediate release of the women, children and old people, and the Vietnam representatives promised support. Later, however, the French High Commissioner could not see his way to approving the Delegate's scheme for making fresh contacts in Indo-China. As a result the ICRC representative visited only one camp, that of Hoa-Binh.

The Delegate returned to Indo-China in February 1948, and arranged for the handing over to the Vietnam Red Cross organisation of a gift in kind from the Indian Red Cross. The French High Commissioner agreed to one half of the supplies being delivered to the addressees, the other half being reserved for the native civil population in areas under French control. The Indian Red Cross could not agree to this arrangement and the whole of the supplies were returned back to it.

When in Saïgon, in May 1948, the ICRC Delegate received mail from French military prisoners in Southern Vietnam. These letters were handed to the French authorities for transmission to the addressees in France, who were notified by the Central Agency.

In August 1948, the Paris Delegation discussed schemes for welfare work in Indo-China with the French Government; early in December, the Delegate in Indo-China also had talks on the subject with the new French High Commissioner.

The Vietnam Red Cross organisation had then proposed to the French Red Cross, by wireless, the resumption of the exchange of mail and relief parcels, through contacts between the fighting lines, like those which had taken place repeatedly in 1947. A meeting was fixed for January 10, 1949.¹

The Delegate in Indo-China arranged to hand over to the Vietnam Red Cross organisation on that date, medical supplies and surgical instruments to the value of 500,000 French francs, representing half the donation of the Vietnamese in France.

He had at his disposal a gift of 5,000 Swiss francs, a private donation given for the benefit of French internees in Vietnamese hands.

¹ It took place in February, 1949.