

Paraguay

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IV. Paraguay

During the Civil War which broke out in Paraguay in the Spring of 1947, the ICRC filled its accepted role of neutral intermediary. The Delegation in Buenos Aires approached the Paraguay Red Cross with a request to allow the Uruguayan Red Cross to fly over Paraguayan territory, to Asunción and Concepción, with medical supplies for both sides. Permission was granted, and an Uruguayan medical plane, displaying the Red Cross emblem, left Montevideo with a large supply. At the instance of the Delegation in Buenos Aires, the Argentine Government allowed the Uruguayan Red Cross to store the medicaments for the regular forces in Posadas, near the Paraguayan frontier, and to make similar provision at Ponta Pora (Caballero), on the North Paraguayan frontier, for the use of the rebel forces.

In June 1947, one of the ICRC Director-Delegates, who was on mission in Latin American, visited Asunción. On June 17, he proposed certain relief measures to the authorities of Paraguay, and suggested that they should be carried out by the Paraguayan Red Cross, or some other neutral organisation. The measures suggested were :

- (1)—To issue lists of prisoners of war and civilian internees to relatives;
- (2)—To allow prisoners and internees to receive and dispatch letters;
- (3)—To allow prisoners and internees to receive food parcels;
- (4)—To allow Red Cross Delegates and representatives of neutral relief organisations to care for prisoners, and help them by visits and personal talks.

In July, 1947, a similar statement was forwarded through the Brazilian Red Cross to the Military Government at Concepción.

In September, the ICRC obtained the agreement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Paraguay that the measures proposed during the fighting should apply until complete settlement was reached.

The ICRC was supported in this not only by the National Red Cross Societies of neighbouring countries, but also by non-official bodies, such as the Rotary Club. In August 1947, this association induced the civilian and military authorities of both sides to approve a correspondence card which would allow relatives dispersed by the war to get in touch again.

In August 1947, the Argentine Red Cross sent 500 kilos of medicaments by air and set up a hospital equipped for blood transfusion at Asunción. The doctors and nurses — the latter trained at the Red Cross School — reached Asunción by air.

The Government of Paraguay then declared the civil war at an end; it had lasted five months, from March 7 to August 22, 1947, and had claimed five thousand dead and wounded. In addition, 50,000 persons had been driven from their homes; they were finding it difficult to return, and were being assisted by a Relief Committee, sponsored by the Argentine Red Cross.

Acting on a programme suggested by the ICRC, the Paraguayan Red Cross was unceasing in its efforts to help the sick and wounded, and brought a much appreciated assistance to the Army Medical Service.

On November 5, 1947, the head of the Army Medical Corps of Paraguay reported to his Government that the last of the wounded and sick of the revolution had been discharged; they numbered 251 wounded and 60 sick. He congratulated and thanked the Paraguayan Red Cross for its share in bringing about their recovery.

The ICRC was happy to associate itself with these congratulations.