

# The Near East

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## II. — THE NEAR EAST

The armistices in Palestine did not bring tension there to an end. The line of demarcation was patrolled by military, and difficult to cross. Traffic in Jerusalem between the Old Town, held by Jordan forces, and the New Town, in Israeli hands, did not become normal.

Accordingly, the Committee continued all during 1950 to act as a neutral intermediary, visiting prisoners of war not yet sent back, arranging the exchange of "civilian messages", and searching for missing relatives.

The ICRC Commissariat continued, to April 30, 1950, to assist refugees as part of the United Nations scheme. It handed over at that date to UNRWA, the new United Nations Agency;<sup>1</sup> the head of the Commissariat, M. Alfred Escher, was able to arrange that most of the poor of Jerusalem, whom the Committee had been helping out of its own resources, would be assisted as if they were refugees. The Commissariat and the scheme for the Jerusalem poor thus both ended for the Committee on April 30, 1950. (See p. 72.)

### **Traditional Activities**

As indicated in the 1949 Report (p. 73), Delegates supervised the exchange of prisoners which took place after the armistice in Palestine. But their work for prisoners of war did not end there. Local incidents after the armistice led to the taking of fresh prisoners. Delegates at Amman and Jerusalem visited several camps and prisons in Jordan where there were Israeli prisoners.

The system of civilian messages and inquiries, begun in the chief towns in 1948, continued on a reduced scale after the main fighting had ended in 1949, and was still called upon in 1950. Families had been broken up, and many people disappeared during the fighting and the movements of population. The Arab minority in Israel is estimated at 160,000, and many

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 67-71.

inquiries came in from Arabs inside and outside Israel. The Delegations in the Near East recruited local assistance and performed a useful service in counteracting the lack of postal relations between Israel and the neighbouring States. In 1950, 28,000 civilian messages were transmitted, and 1,000 cases of military or civilians missing were dealt with.

With a view especially to reuniting dispersed families, transport was found for repatriated civilians. A total of 301 persons included 139 to Israel, 134 from Israel, and 28 travelling in transit via Israel.

Before and after the armistice, the Delegations had endeavoured to secure for civil internees treatment at least equal to that of prisoners of war. Approaches were made on similar lines to the Israeli authorities on behalf of Arabs who had returned clandestinely to the villages they had previously left, and had on that account been arrested by the Israeli police.

Each month, the ICRC also arranged for shipments of food to certain charitable institutions in the New Town, which could not obtain supplies in Israeli territory. Suitable arrangements were made with the Jordan and Israeli authorities, and a representative of the Committee travelled with the consignments. In October, for example, 3,900 kilos of food, including eggs, olive oil, potatoes, onions, cereals, vegetables and fruit, were brought in this way to the Poor Clare, Franciscan, Salesian and Carmelite Convents, the Benedictine Monastery, the St. Vincent de Paul Hospice, the Terra Sancta College, the French Hospital and the German Hospice—all situated in the New Town.

### **Aid to Palestine Refugees**

In some respects, the last period during which the Commissariat operated—January 1 to April 30, 1950—made the heaviest calls on its staff.

An exceptionally hard winter increased the refugees' needs. Apparently for the first time in centuries, snow fell at Jericho; roads were blocked, some for several days. In face of this unexpected situation, which caught the local authorities un-

prepared, Delegates had to arrange, as best they could, the shipment of food and blankets to the camps. Their prompt action succeeded in checking what threatened to be a mass, uncontrolled flight to the valley of the Jordan.

The elections in Jordan and Palestine were an indirect cause of further serious complications. It became difficult—and sometimes risky—to check refugee lists. Many electors tried to enlist the support of the local authorities in reversing decisions of the Commissariat.

The rupture of the economic union between Syria and Lebanon resulted in an additional Customs frontier on the overland route, between Beirut and the Committee's distribution centres.

Certain precautions had however, been taken; tents had been made waterproof, and reserves of flour built up at Hebron and Bethlehem. In spite of the severe weather, the program had continued; medical assistance was given as well as food, schools were opened in co-operation with UNESCO, and tailoring and other workshops set up.

The following table, with figures of the last census of refugees taken, shows a diminution of one-tenth in the numbers receiving United Nations aid. The figures include persons in hospitals and institutions considered as refugees, but refer neither to the poor, nor to those whose homes had been destroyed.

*Refugees on Distribution Lists*

	January	February	March	April 1950
Jericho . . . . .	45,374	48,317	48,239	44,737
Ramallah . . . . .	69,831	66,496	66,262	65,231
Nablus . . . . .	117,212	113,000	109,000	108,149
Jerusalem . . . . .	36,956	36,790	32,180	32,235
Bethlehem . . . . .	40,248	40,169	40,409	39,475
Hebron . . . . .	82,683	87,869	87,869	79,894
Totals . . . . .	392,304	392,641	383,959	369,721
Israel . . . . .	48,644	48,070	49,130	45,685
Grand totals . . . . .	440,948	440,711	433,089	415,406

*United Nations Allocations*

**UNRPR**

Basic Goods	Jan.	Feb.	March	April
Flour . . . . .	4,200	4,200	3,780	3,780
Pulses . . . . .	293	170	294	296
Oil . . . . .	109	109	107	107
Sugar . . . . .	84	84	59.5	59.5
Sundries . . . . .	Halawa	Jam	Halawa	Dried Fr.
	33	26	36	27.4
Potatoes . . . . .	—	95	6	—
Totals . . . . .	4,719	4,684	4,282.5	4,269.9
Refugees on Ration Lists..	440,948	440,711	433,089	415,406

Various goods, including blankets, textiles, clothing and underclothing, were provided by the International Refugee Organization. The following were, in addition, given by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

**UNICEF**

Goods (in kilos)	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	Totals
Full milk, powdered - Net.	26,193	—	—	—	26,193
Condensed milk, unsweetened - Net. . .	—	52,801	55,795	—	108,596
Skim milk, powdered - Net. . . . .	278,495	228,944	199,886	33,719	741,044
Sugar - Net. . . . .	63,000	63,000	66,500	—	192,500
Margarine - Net. . . . .	58,500	58,500	61,324	30,289	208,613
Rice - Gross. . . . .	195,000	195,000	195,000	133,295	718,295
Dried fruits - Net. . . .	—	10,992	27,500	—	38,492
Cod-liver Oil - Net. . .	41,311	—	—	—	41,311
Soap . . . . .	—	—	—	39,119	39,119

*Medical Relief.* — The Medical Service had its busiest period towards the end of 1950.

Six hospitals were entirely maintained by the Commissariat and ten others partly. The central analytical laboratory in the

Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem made 790 analyses in December 1949; by April 1950, the figure had risen to 1,533, including 376 clinical, 782 bacteriological, and 395 serological (Kahn and Meinicke). Once the laboratory had been opened, water in each camp was regularly tested and the results communicated to the district medical authorities and the sanitary inspectors responsible for sterilizing contaminated sources. Systematic tracing was also done of germ carriers of intestinal affections, and the laboratory greatly assisted in fighting syphilis.

After its sixteen months of medical work in Palestine, the Commissariat was able to hand over to the new United Nations agency an organized service capable of greatly helping in the promotion of health and in combating disease in Palestine.

*Schools.* — Thanks to the devotion of refugee teachers, the schools available in the early autumn of 1949 met the most urgent needs. Their means were, however, limited in the extreme, and insufficient for the training and educational plans the Commissariat hoped to put through.

Large grants from UNESCO enabled the Commissariat, at the beginning of 1950, to reorganize the schools thoroughly and increase their number.

The school in Jericho had 350 pupils in July 1949, 510 at the beginning of November, 950 in January, and 1,500 at the end of April.

Neweimeh Camp, with 2,000 refugees in March, was provided with a school capable of taking 400 pupils immediately.

The 360 pupils in Nablus (November 1949) were divided into six classes. At the end of April, there were 2,089, and 35 classes.

Similar progress was made at Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron.

The teaching program followed that of the Government schools.

*Workshops.* — The local Delegates had already set up tailoring workshops at Ramallah, Nablus, and Jerusalem. With material supplied by the United Nations, the Commissariat developed these centres considerably at the beginning of 1950.

It was feared that issues of material, not made up, might lead to black-marketing. Women refugees were accordingly put to making garments, which, with the approach of winter, were very urgently needed. Work centres were opened in January at Jericho, and in February at Bethlehem and Hebron ; supplies were given to the workshops at Nablus, Ramallah and Jerusalem.

The output, for four months, exceeded 82,000 garments. Paid work was given to 200 women, and training to 300 apprentices.

It was only in March, 1950, towards the end of its mission, that the Commissariat was able to organize other workshops in each of its sectors. The principal object was to train young people as carpenters, cobblers, and tinsmiths. It was hoped that the workshops would eventually become self-supporting ; by January, this had already occurred in the tinshop in Jerusalem.

The workshops found their raw materials locally. Leather was purchased, but rubber, wood and tin were obtained without cost by using old tyres and empty packing-cases. Tools were paid for by UNESCO.

Products included stools, benches, school blackboards, tables, chairs, doors, cradles, cupboards, boxes, tent pegs, shoes and sandals, milk mugs, spirit-lamps, and cans. Repairs were made to footwear and household articles.

By April, fifteen apprentice workshops had been set up : seven carpentry, five cobbling, two tinshops, and one stone-cutting. Nineteen refugee artisans were in charge of the 270 apprentices.

On April 30, 1950, the Commissariat handed over to the new agency set up for the purpose : the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

### **Relief to the Jerusalem Indigenous Poor**

In Jerusalem, the Committee had organized an independent relief program for poor inhabitants who, not being technically refugees, were excluded from United Nations relief. This program, described in some detail in the 1949 Report (p. 74),



covered 14,000 people reduced to poverty through the loss of their occupations in the New Town—a serious addition to the 20,000 refugees, and to the poor who had always been in the city. From April 1949 to May 1950, this new category received monthly rations from the Committee.

Before handing over, arrangements were made for UNRWA to accept responsibility for 11,000 of them, the remaining 3,000 being cared for by the World Lutheran Organization. During his second visit to Palestine, M. Ruegger was handed an address of thanks, in English and Arabic, bearing the signatures of the heads of the religious communities, and of the Mayor, Counsellors, and public figures of the city, in appreciation of the Committee's assistance to the Jerusalem poor.<sup>1</sup>

### III. — INDIA AND PAKISTAN

During 1950, the centre of the Committee's activities in the Indian Peninsula changed from Kashmir, where it concentrated its efforts almost exclusively in 1949,<sup>2</sup> to Bengal.

The disturbances in Kashmir had died down, but a two-way flight of refugees which began in Bengal almost led to war.

We shall refer briefly to the Committee's work in Kashmir before turning to deal in more detail with Bengal.

#### **Kashmir**

The Committee supplied medical relief to the Kashmiri refugees in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. A first consignment, in May, included seven first-aid and two gynaecological and obstetrical outfits, worth 12,500 francs. In August, two mobile X-ray outfits, worth 17,800 francs, reached Karachi.

In Indian territory and in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, refugees received, in July, some 2,600 kilos of medical supplies,

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<sup>1</sup> An inset reproduction of this address was made in the July 1950 number of the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge*. See also p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> See *Report* for 1949, p. 86.