

# Latin America

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development of legal assistance, in collaboration with the various Red Cross agencies, and governmental and non-governmental organisations.

It has noted with satisfaction the work of the offices and branches which have been set up to provide legal assistance, particularly in Germany, Austria, Brazil, Greece and Italy.

## **II. The activity of the ICRC following some recent conflicts**

In 1954 the ICRC continued to give practical service in favour of the victims of disturbances and conflicts in Latin America, Asia and Europe.

### **I. LATIN AMERICA**

**Guatemala.** — On being informed of the events in Guatemala, on June 21, 1954, the ICRC sent a telegram to the Guatemalan Red Cross Society, offering its services. On June 24, the ICRC stated that it was prepared to send one of its delegates from Geneva, and on June 24 and 25 it broadcast an appeal, drawing the attention of all concerned to the Red Cross principles, and earnestly requesting that the civilian population should not be the object of attacks, that suffering should be limited and that the victims should be given assistance. The message reflected the concern which was felt at the time in regard to the possibility of the mass bombing of the civilian population.

A little later, the two parties to the conflict having accepted the International Committee's offer of intervention, in the form in which it was made, the Deputy-Director of the Central Prisoners of War Agency, a former delegate in Spain, was appointed for the mission.

As the Geneva Conventions had been ratified by Guatemala in May 1954, Article 3 of the Fourth Convention (relating to armed conflict during internal disturbances) was therefore applicable. This circumstance facilitated the work of the International Committee's delegate, as the article in question provides for the

humane treatment of the victims of disturbances ; it expressly states that " an impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services ", and that the Parties to the conflict " should further endeavour to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention ". As the prompt solution of the armed conflict soon made it impossible to conclude any special agreement of that nature, the action of the representative of the International Committee was consequently all the more appropriate.

The representative of the ICRC left Geneva for Mexico on July 2. He arrived on July 3 and was received by the President of the Mexican Red Cross, accompanied by other Members of the Society, and the ICRC Delegate in Mexico. With their kind assistance—and in this connection a tribute should be paid to the competent service rendered by the Mexican Red Cross—the delegate was able to procure within a few days (in accordance with the instructions he had received on leaving Geneva) emergency medical relief supplies, with funds supplied by the International Committee, and to organise his journey to the Guatemalan capital where he arrived on July 11 ; he was met by the President and Members of the Guatemalan Red Cross Society.

A very significant fact should be mentioned here. As hoped by the International Committee, this National Society did not suffer from the effects of the political upheaval. Its directors remained in office throughout the events which occurred from June 18. This continuity was of very great importance, and it may be presumed that the ICRC helped in this connection by showing its confidence in the Society's impartiality, from the very outset of the conflict.

On July 14 the representative of the ICRC was received by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the new Government. The Minister assured him that he would be granted all facilities, in particular to visit the places of internment of political detainees. The National Red Cross Society had also received authority from the Government to visit the establishments and to assist the detainees.

Three days later, accredited by the Home Office, the delegate, accompanied by two representatives of the Guatemalan Red Cross Society, visited the town prison, inspected the various divisions of the establishment and had a long talk concerning the conditions of internment with several political detainees. One thousand two hundred men were assembled in four or five guardrooms. Owing to a lack of bedding material they slept on the floors. Further, the food supplies were far from sufficient for the prisoners' normal meals. The director of the prison was quite prepared to accept the help of humanitarian agencies to improve the situation and, thanks to the immediate steps taken by the Red Cross, a few bags of rice, lentils and sugar were supplied, which allowed for the most pressing needs to be met until the administrative services could be re-organised.

The delegate then visited a prison installed in a police barrack, in most unsanitary conditions ; water was lacking and an epidemic had broken out. By his efforts an entire storey was fumigated, repainted and handed over to the Red Cross for use as a hospital. This measure stopped the progress of the epidemic. A little later, representatives of the Press were authorised to visit the premises ; their report on their visit had a most beneficial effect upon public opinion.

On July 20, without previous notice, the delegate visited the women's prison. He then proceeded to the provinces and, again accompanied by representatives of the National Society, he visited Zacapa and Chiquimula Prisons, which contained numerous internees. For this inspection a military plane had been placed at his disposal, the roads being impracticable for car traffic on account of the rainy season.

Following his first visit, the ICRC representative made various suggestions for the improvement of the internees' conditions to the Home Office authorities. He also informed the Guatemalan Red Cross Society, whose efforts he was supporting, of his views on the subject. Mention should be made of the efforts which this Society, in pursuance of the Red Cross ideal, has made and continues to make in connection with assistance to political detainees. Through its intermediary the representative of the International Committee

was able to despatch sundry relief supplies to the places of detention; it also took charge of the hospital service in one of the prisons of the capital. Thanks to its good offices, and with the help of medicaments supplied by the ICRC, health conditions returned to normal.

The International Committee's representative had been requested, on leaving Geneva, to make enquiries concerning relief which might be needed for the civilian population, with a view to the sending out of an appeal by the League of Red Cross Societies to all National Societies. The Guatemalan Red Cross Society did not think, however, that it was necessary to launch an appeal. The International Committee duly advised the League, which it had kept informed of all the details supplied by its representative in Guatemala.

## 2. ASIA

**Korea.** — Previous reports<sup>1</sup>, and the two volumes published under the title "*Le Comité international de la Croix Rouge et le conflit de Corée*", are a most pertinent illustration of the efforts made by the ICRC to aid war victims in Korea; the suspension of hostilities and the evolution in the situation which had taken place, made it unnecessary to continue its activity in this field. Its representatives received instructions from Geneva to bring their mission to a close in March 1954, and to return to Switzerland. Requests for the tracing of missing persons continue to be dealt with at the ICRC headquarters in Geneva. The chapter entitled "Central Prisoners of War Agency" gives useful information concerning this action<sup>2</sup>.

**Indochina.** — The events in Indo China imposed new duties upon the ICRC.

Hospital planes and helicopters carrying the wounded were fired upon by the Anti-Aircraft Defence and sustained damage;

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reports on the work of the ICRC*, 1950, p. 80, 1951, p. 66, 1952, p. 52, 1953, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 50.