

Middle East

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Middle East

For the seventh successive year, the ICRC rendered assistance to the civilian and military victims of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. It sought to protect and assist prisoners of war, civilian internees and detainees, and the civilian populations. To that end, it maintained delegations in Israel and the occupied territories, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. A number of humanitarian problems resulting from the October 1973 war having been settled, the number of its delegates in the field, which had risen to twenty-eight (plus six technicians from Geneva) on account of the conflict, was gradually reduced to nineteen by the end of 1974. These delegates are assisted in their daily tasks by a large staff of locally-recruited persons.

Generally speaking, apart from the question of prisoners of war, the October 1973 war did not have a major impact on the work of the ICRC delegates in the field, whether in Israel or in the neighbouring Arab countries.

A table summarizing the relief action conducted by the ICRC in the Middle East is given on page 62 of this Report.

Conflict between Israel and the Arab Countries

It will be recalled that the ICRC, having received numerous complaints of violations of the Geneva Conventions from the Parties to the conflict, had proposed, in identical notes to the three Governments concerned dated 12 December 1973, that joint commissions of enquiry should be set up in accordance with Article 52 of the First, Article 53 of the Second, Article 132 of the Third and Article 149 of the Fourth Conventions, in order that light might be objectively shed on the facts and further violations prevented.

On 11 March 1974, the Egyptian Government accepted the principle of the creation of a commission of enquiry but demanded, *inter alia*, that it should consist of neutral members, possibly designated by the ICRC, and that its activities should cover alleged violations committed since the war of 1967.

On 2 August, the Israeli Government in its turn signified its approval of the principle involved, but wished to restrict the field of activity of the commissions of enquiry to complaints made by the belligerents concerning allegations of violations of the Third Convention relating to the treatment of prisoners of war.

No reply to the ICRC proposal was received from the Syrian Government.

ACTION ON BEHALF OF THE WOUNDED AND SICK

The evacuation of 1,636 wounded and sick from Suez Hospital to Cairo was completed on 23 January. Up to that date, 20 tons of relief supplies had been convoyed to Suez by ICRC delegates, who also visited the population of the town, encircled by Israeli forces, several times.

ACTION ON BEHALF OF PRISONERS OF WAR

The ICRC continued to render assistance to prisoners of war held in Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. Its delegates visited them on several occasions and were given the opportunity to speak with them without witnesses.

In the course of those visits, the ICRC delegates brought books, games, food and cigarettes to the prisoners of war, dealt with their individual problems and needs and took charge of the forwarding of family mail.

Israel

At the beginning of 1974, there were in Israel altogether 501 Arab prisoners of war, of whom 386 were Syrians, 99 Egyptians, 10 Iraqis and 6 Moroccans.

The delegates of the ICRC carried out 18 visits to these Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi and Moroccan prisoners of war in their various places of detention. Reports on these visits were transmitted by the ICRC to the prisoners' own governments and to the Detaining Power.

Further captures of seven Syrians were made on 5 February, 8 April, 30 April and 9 May, while on 22 April a Syrian prisoner

of war was released in the Golan Heights territory temporarily occupied after the October 1973 conflict. On the eve of the repatriation operations, at the beginning of June, there were thus altogether 392 Syrian prisoners of war in Israel.

Syria

In Syria, ICRC delegates visited the 68 Israeli prisoners of war, interned since the beginning of the October 1973 war, for the first time on 1 March 1974. On the previous day the ICRC had been notified by the Syrian authorities of the number and identity of the prisoners. In all, three visits were made by the delegates to the able-bodied prisoners of war, and four to those in hospital. The ICRC delegates spoke with the prisoners without witnesses, but the Syrian authorities did not allow a medical delegate to visit the wounded. Reports on these visits were sent to the Syrian and Israeli authorities.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, two Israeli prisoners of war, captured on 8 April 1974, were detained until 8 June. A delegate of the ICRC visited them four times, and his reports were transmitted to the Israeli and Lebanese authorities.

Repatriations

Four repatriation operations, one at Kilometre 101 on the Cairo-Suez road and the other three on the road from El Qantara to Baluza in Sinai, carried out between 25 January and 25 February under the auspices of the ICRC, enabled 99 Egyptian prisoners of war captured after 22 November 1973 (when the earlier repatriations of Egyptian and Israeli prisoners of war had been concluded) to return to their country.

Later, in accordance with requests from the Syrian and Israeli authorities, the ICRC organized the repatriation in two stages of the wounded and able-bodied Syrian and Israeli prisoners of war. Three aircraft were used for these operations: a Boeing 747 B, a Fokker Friendship F-27 and a DC-6.

On 1 June, thirty-eight wounded prisoners of war were repatriated to their respective countries on board two aircraft, which took off simultaneously from Tel Aviv and Damascus. One brought twenty-five Syrian and one Moroccan prisoners of war back to Syria, while the other flew twelve Israeli prisoners of war back to Israel. Each group of wounded was escorted on the flight by an ICRC team consisting of a doctor, a nurse and a delegate.

On 6 June, the second phase of the operation was completed by the ICRC with the repatriation of 438 able-bodied prisoners of war by means of three aircraft.

Two aircraft took off from Tel Aviv for Damascus, one with 345 and the other with thirty-seven passengers, a total of 382 prisoners of war (367 Syrians, 10 Iraqis and five Moroccans). At the same moment a third aircraft left Damascus for Israel with fifty-six Israeli prisoners of war. Each aircraft carried a delegate and a doctor.

A Syrian prisoner of war was captured later, on 16 August. He was twice visited by ICRC delegates and released on 2 October at Quneitra under ICRC auspices.

SEARCH FOR MORTAL REMAINS

Early in 1974, ICRC delegates took part in some of the many search operations conducted between the cease-fire lines separating the Israeli and Egyptian forces for the remains of Israeli soldiers killed in action during the October 1973 war.

In addition, during the first three months of 1974, repatriations of mortal remains were carried out under ICRC auspices on four separate occasions. Eighty-two bodies of soldiers killed in action were returned to Israel, and 112 to Egypt, in the course of these operations conducted between the cease-fire lines in Sinai.

A similar operation took place on 6 June, at Tel-Shams, close to the cease-fire lines between Syrian and Israeli forces, when sixteen bodies were returned to Israel and eight to Syria. On that occasion, the Israeli authorities handed over to the Syrian authorities, through the ICRC, a list containing the names of 309 Arab soldiers whose bodies had been identified and buried alongside 470 non-identified Arab soldiers in a cemetery, laid out by the Israeli authorities east of Quneitra in the stretch of territory since handed back to Syria.

On 27 October, the mortal remains of another Israeli soldier were brought back from Syria under the auspices of the ICRC.

FOURTH CONVENTION

ICRC action in occupied territories: No change having occurred in the position of principle taken by the Israeli authorities, consisting as will be recalled in leaving open the question of the applicability of the Fourth Convention of 1949 in occupied territories, the ICRC continued to exercise its activities on a pragmatic basis.

In consequence, the ICRC, while maintaining its own position with regard to the applicability of the Fourth Convention, endeavoured to ensure, as circumstances permitted, the fullest possible application of the Convention's provisions. In various fields the Israel authorities granted facilities to the ICRC delegates which allowed them, as in the past, to take useful action in favour of the victims of the conflict.

In certain cases, however, the ICRC came up against the position of principle adopted by Israel and could not obtain satisfaction.

Civilian detainees and internees

ICRC delegates continued to carry out visits to some 2,700 Arab civilians from occupied territories and Arab countries, imprisoned in fourteen places of detention in Israel and in the occupied territories. The delegates visited the six prisons in the occupied territories once a month and the eight prisons in Israel every other month. The visits were the subject of reports which the ICRC sent to the Detaining Power and to the prisoners' own governments.

Although the Israeli authorities, in line with their position in the matter of the applicability of the Fourth Convention, did not consider themselves bound by the provisions of the Convention respecting notifications, they had agreed in 1973 to communicate as a general rule to the ICRC delegation, after eighteen days from their arrest by the army or the police, the names of subjects of an Arab country or an occupied territory. Such notifications may not for the present be transmitted to the governments of the countries of origin and are intended solely for the use of the ICRC and for the families of detainees.

ICRC delegates were allowed to visit security cases, at the end of the period of investigation, whether held in preventive custody, sentenced or administratively interned, as well as common law cases. As customary, they could speak with detainees without witnesses.

The delegates approached the Israeli authorities regarding various matters connected with detention conditions.

In the medical field, they distributed gifts such as dentures, artificial limbs, spectacles, etc.

They recommended the creation of additional workshops and the active development of secondary classes in places of detention and they continued to provide manuals, copy-books and pens for this purpose.

The Israeli authorities for their part complied to a large extent with the ICRC's recommendations.

The ICRC delegates continued their monthly distribution of parcels to those detainees who had received no family visits: in 1974 a total of 6,508 parcels were so distributed. This figure does not include 2,431 parcels of fresh fruit distributed among all detainees from November onward.

As had been done in the past, the ICRC made transport arrangements to enable families to visit their relatives in prison. It organized and to a large extent paid for 620 voyages by bus and 188 by taxi for 29,375 relatives of detainees.

At the talks between Egyptians and Israelis at Kilometre 101, it had been agreed that a relatively high number of civilian detainees, whose homes were in the Nile Valley and Sinai, would be released, under ICRC auspices and repatriated to Egypt. These detainees were to have the option of taking their families and personal belongings with them. Each detainee, before deciding whether or not to accept the offer to go to the Nile Valley, was given the opportunity to speak in private with an ICRC delegate and to meet members of his family. In all, 168 detainees were released in this way, in the course of six operations carried out between 4 March and 1 July, twenty-five of them taking their families back with them. At the time of the first operation, two Israeli civilians imprisoned in Egypt were repatriated.

Three Syrian Druze civilians living in the occupied part of the Golan, who had been captured on 6 August by a Palestinian armed group and taken to Syria, were allowed to return to their homes in occupied territory under ICRC auspices.

In addition, ICRC delegates made arrangements to remove to neighbouring Arab countries a number of civilian detainees who had expressed of their own free will, in the presence of the delegates only, their desire to proceed to those countries.

* * *

It should be mentioned that although no cases occurred in 1974 that fell under the Fourth Convention, the head of the ICRC delegation asked to visit some Palestinian detainees. The Jordanian Government did not see its way to agree to that request.

Reuniting of families

The ICRC delegates continued their efforts to secure that members of families separated by the 1967 war might be reunited.

Arab Republic of Egypt and Gaza-Sinai: The family-reuniting operations, which had been temporarily suspended as a result of the October 1973 conflict, were resumed on 20 March. From that time they no longer took place on the Suez Canal but in the centre of the buffer zone and with the co-operation of the United Nations Emergency Force.

Altogether, nineteen family-reuniting operations were arranged under ICRC auspices, permitting 111 persons coming from Egypt to rejoin their families in the occupied territories of Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and 330 persons from the occupied territories to be reunited with their families in Egypt.

In the course of those operations, a number of persons, authorized to visit relatives on one side or the other, also crossed the cease-fire lines for that purpose. Thus, 1,866 persons went from Sinai and the Gaza strip to Egypt and back again to the occupied territories, while 2,271 persons travelled and returned in the opposite directions.

Lebanon and occupied territories: In 1974 the ICRC made arrangements for the transfer, via Beirut, of eighteen persons from the Gaza Strip who wished to be reunited with their families settled in an Arab country which did not have a common frontier with Israel.

Syria and the Golan Heights: In 1974 two operations were arranged near Quneitra, under ICRC auspices, enabling thirty persons to be reunited with their families in occupied territory in the Golan heights.

Jordan and the occupied West Bank: As in previous years, the ICRC's action was confined to endorsing, on humanitarian grounds affecting specific families, applications which the competent Israeli authorities had not approved under the normal procedure—a procedure that covers the large majority of cases involving the reuniting of families in the occupied territories of the West Bank. Authorizations were granted to twelve out of the sixty-six cases submitted.

In view of this low result, renewed approaches were made by the ICRC to endeavour to increase the number of approvals; but the proportion of successful cases remained low considering the precarious situation of the families concerned.

Student travel

Arab Republic of Egypt and Gaza-Sinai: Palestinian students and students from Sinai, registered with Egyptian universities and numbering 3,518, were authorized to join their families in Gaza and Sinai for the summer vacation or on completion of their studies. From 16 July to 5 August, in thirteen operations carried out under the auspices of the ICRC through the United Nations buffer zone, they moved from Egypt to the occupied territories.

From 2 September onwards, the movement started in the opposite direction for students wishing to continue their studies and for new students. A total of 4,324 students were moved to Egypt in a series of thirteen operations lasting until 17 December.

It may be noted that compared with the previous year, there was an increase of approximately 35 per cent in the number of students

who crossed the cease-fire lines between Israel and Egypt under ICRC auspices.

Algeria and the Gaza Strip: When the Algerian Government, just after the October 1973 conflict, offered scholarships to sixty Palestinian students from the Gaza Strip to enable them to attend university courses at Algiers, the ICRC made arrangements for the students selected by the Gaza Education Department to proceed via Amman and Cairo. The fifty-two students who had accepted Algeria's invitation travelled under ICRC auspices in two groups, thirty going on 6 March and twenty-two on 11 March.

For the summer vacation, forty-seven of these students returned to Gaza, joining groups of their fellows studying in Egypt for the trips in both directions.

Lebanon and the Gaza Strip: Notwithstanding ICRC approaches, fifty-six new students from Gaza, registered with various institutes of higher education in Beirut, did not obtain authorization from the Lebanese Government to go to Lebanon. Only a small number holding Jordanian passports were able to reach Beirut through Jordan.

Syria and the Gaza Strip: Arrangements were made by the ICRC for Palestinian students from Gaza, registered at Damascus University, to join their families for the summer vacation. The first operation took place on 15 July under ICRC auspices near Quneitra, enabling 85 students to reach their homes in Gaza. Five others who did not get through with that group had to proceed through Jordan and to cross Allenby Bridge in a second operation organized by the ICRC on 26 July.

On 19 August, eighty-seven of those students crossed the cease-fire lines between the Syrian and Israeli forces, under ICRC auspices, to return to Damascus.

New territories temporarily occupied following the October 1973 war

Territory west of the Suez Canal: Delegates of the ICRC made five visits to the territory occupied by the Israeli army west of the Suez Canal, as a result of the October 1973 war, before it was handed

back, in several stages, between 25 January and 21 February 1974, to Egypt. In the course of those visits, they examined to what extent the living conditions of the civilians who had stayed behind conformed with the Fourth Convention's provisions. A medical delegate speaking fluent Arabic took part in one of the visits. The findings of the delegates were recorded in detailed reports, the substance of which was communicated to the Powers concerned.

ICRC delegates also visited on two occasions the Norwegian, Czech, Bulgarian and Polish crews of the fourteen ships blocked in the Great Bitter Lake since 1976, in order to verify that they lacked nothing.

Golan Heights: It was only in March 1974 that the delegates of the ICRC were authorized to enter the territory newly occupied by Israeli troops on the Golan Heights as a result of the October 1973 war and later returned to Syria, between 14 and 15 June 1974. Permission for the delegates to enter this territory had been withheld by the Israeli authorities until such time as the Syrian authorities had granted authorization to the ICRC to visit the Israeli prisoners of war held in Syria.

The ICRC delegates visited this territory four times and met the civilian population, mostly of Druze allegiance, who had remained on the spot.

Outstanding problems connected with the Fourth Convention

In the occupied territories, the ICRC's mission is to carry out a thorough and continuing appraisal of the situation of the civilian populations in the light of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In every case where the protection and rights of civilians under the Convention are not assured or respected, the ICRC delegation endeavours to obtain that the Israeli authorities will remedy the situation so created.

In this context, the main problems encountered by the ICRC for which no satisfactory solutions have yet been found are those connected with expulsions and the destruction of dwellings ordered

by the Israeli authorities under the heading of repressive measures, in violation of Articles 49, 33 and 53 of the Fourth Convention.

While no person has been expelled, to the knowledge of the ICRC, from the occupied territories of Gaza and Sinai, it is known on the other hand that twelve West Bank Palestinians were compelled to leave their homes and seek refuge in an Arab country.

On 12 March, two inhabitants of the village of Halhoul in the district of Hebron were removed across the border to Jordan.

A similar measure was taken on 21 November against four schoolteachers in Ramallah and one in Jericho.

These persons were visited by an ICRC delegate in Jordan.

In addition, on 4 November, five persons were expelled and sent to Lebanon.

In each of these cases the ICRC delegation in Israel and the occupied territories approached the Israeli authorities, requesting that the persons expelled might be allowed to return to their families in the occupied territories.

The situation of the victims whose homes were destroyed by the Israeli army in the occupied territories was often aggravated by the arrest of one or more members of the family concerned, and such cases continued to be a source of concern for the ICRC, which holds that such destructions are contrary to the provisions of Articles 33 and 53 of the Fourth Convention.

In 1974, the ICRC delegates in Gaza were notified of 50 such cases, involving nearly 300 persons. In West Bank territory, thirty houses were destroyed and six bricked up, affecting more than 150 persons.

On several occasions, the delegation communicated its viewpoint to the Israeli authorities as to the principle of carrying out the destruction of houses and the deep concern it felt about such acts, and requested that steps should be taken to find homes for the victims.

In each case, the delegates made every effort to obtain that the Israeli Ministry of Social Welfare should either provide material aid for the homeless without delay, or should authorize the ICRC to supply them with tents and blankets immediately. In the majority of cases, the victims received in this way emergency relief allowing them to face the situation.

Medical and health situation in the occupied territories in Sinai and the Gaza Strip

From 3 March to 6 June, a medical delegate of the ICRC made a thorough survey of the medical and health situation of the population in Sinai and the Gaza Strip.

This mission was a sequel to two similar medical surveys conducted by the ICRC in 1971 and 1972.

The medical delegate first went to the Gaza Strip, where he visited six hospitals, all of which, except the last-mentioned, were under Israeli administration. The hospitals visited were the El Shifa, Nasr and Eye Hospitals at Gaza, the hospital at Khan Yunis, the Tuberculosis Hospital at El Breij and the Baptist Hospital at Gaza. He also made a round of the 16 dispensaries in service throughout the Gaza Strip and visited the Red Crescent and the Blood Bank.

In Sinai, the medical delegate went first to El Arish Hospital, the central clinic and the dental clinic. He then visited in turn nearly all the inhabited areas of the peninsula from north to south and saw how each of the three mobile clinics, and the fifteen or so infirmaries set up in various places, were operating.

The medical delegate's mission consisted in particular in making a survey of the measures adopted by the Occupying Power's health services to counter the shortage of medical and paramedical personnel and to remedy the deterioration, due to age, of equipment, medical facilities and hospital buildings.

The ICRC approached the Occupying Power with a view to the early solution of certain urgent problems and so that all necessary steps might be taken for improving the situation in line with the medical delegate's suggestions. As in the past, the latter's findings and recommendations, concerning in particular the improvement and modernization of certain hospitals, the development of the medical and public health infrastructure, the creation of infirmaries and the shortage of medical and nursing personnel, were incorporated in a report which was transmitted by the ICRC to the two Governments concerned.

After having studied the report, the Israeli Government communicated its views to the ICRC and informed it of the various improvements it intended to carry out. It was also agreed that a further visit by the ICRC would take place in 1975.

Action for handicapped persons

In October 1974, the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany contributed a further sum to "Magen David Adom" to provide aid for the handicapped. This enabled the ICRC in Israel to resume, in co-operation with "Magen David Adom", its action for the handicapped in the occupied territories, which had been suspended for some months due to lack of funds. Thirty-two cases were examined, as a result of which it was hoped to fit the patients with artificial limbs towards the beginning of 1975.

Relief Supplies ¹

In 1974, within the framework of its relief programmes, the ICRC supervised the distribution by the Israeli Ministry of Social Welfare and various other bodies of gifts in kind which it had received from the European Economic Community, the Swiss Confederation and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

On the West Bank of the Jordan two thousand tons of flour, a gift from the EEC, and 20 tons of powdered milk, a gift from the Swiss Confederation, were distributed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Relief Service. Towards the end of the year there arrived a further gift from the Swiss Confederation, consisting of 860 tons of flour, to be distributed in 1975.

A gift of 175 tons of relief supplies from the Arab Republic of Egypt was forwarded by sea via Cyprus to Ashdod and delivered to the ICRC. The consignment comprised 60 tons of rice, 48 tons of sugar, 30 tons of lentils, 30 tons of peas and 38,000 metres of cloth. Distribution to the inhabitants of North and Central Sinai was carried out in August, October and November by CARE, in co-operation with the Israeli Ministry of Social Welfare, and under the supervision of the ICRC.

A consignment of 940 tons of flour, a gift from the Swiss Confederation intended for the population of the Gaza Strip and Sinai, arrived at the end of the year at Ashdod and is to be distributed in 1975.

¹ See also table of relief supplies on p. 62, below.