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Relations of
the International Committee of the Red Cross
with the United Nations
and other International Organizations

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of the Red Cross

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RELATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
WITH THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

I. Relations with the United Nations

Before the formal constitution of the United Nations Organization, the ICRC was already in more or less close contact with the institutions which acted as the "fore-runners" of the United Nations, and in particular with UNRRA. On the publication of the United Nations Charter and the effective constitution of UNO, in succession to the League of Nations, the ICRC made contact with UNO and sent special observers to the conferences held in San Francisco and London, and later at Lake Success and Geneva. As a result of these steps, the ICRC was included, on March 28, 1947, amongst the international non-governmental organizations (1) having advisory status with the Economic and Social Council of UNO, in Category B, in accordance with Article 71 of the Charter (2). Relations have since then been fairly constant between the ICRC and UNO.

Early in 1948, the growth of the United Nations Organizations and the constitution of many specialized bodies, whose fields of activity bordered on those of the ICRC, made it necessary for the Committee to have special representation at UNO Headquarters and at their European seat. From February 1948, a member of the Committee's Secretariat was instructed to act as liaison officer with the European seat in Geneva, and in March a special delegate was accredited as observer at Lake Success.

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- (1) The definition given by UNO for Non-Governmental Organizations is the following: Any international organization which is not established by intergovernmental agreement.
- (2) Article 71: "The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned."

II. Reasons why the ICRC established relations with UNO

Several reasons led the ICRC to establish relations of a general character with UNO. As the recipient of daily appeals from persons directly affected by the Second World War, the ICRC, which had gained much experience in the fields of international relief and of the protection of prisoners of war and minorities, was naturally interested in the endeavours made by UNO, on the basis of non-governmental action, to solve these problems. Further, in view of UNO's tendency to centralize and unify international law and humanitarian activities, the ICRC thought it proper that the Red Cross should be, in some way or another, represented with the new organization, since the statutes of the Committee include the maintaining of the uniformity of basic Red Cross principles, as well as Red Cross universality and independence. In its anxiety to affirm the traditional neutrality of the Red Cross, the ICRC confines its relations with UNO to the practical domain, acting strictly within the limits of the humanitarian field and carefully abstaining from any political implications.

III. Practical Questions

As it has done hitherto, the ICRC will pursue and develop its relations with UNO and its specialized agencies on humanitarian lines, and for the purpose of mutual information. The duties of the Committee's delegate in Lake Success are to inform the appropriate departments in Geneva of action by UNO in the fields which may be of interest, and to keep UNO informed of the Committee's activities in the humanitarian sphere, and of any steps it may take as a neutral intermediary in case of war or disturbances. This was done, for instance, in the case of the Palestine conflict, when UNO were notified of the strictly humanitarian work the ICRC was undertaking. The UNO departments have also shown interest in the revised or new Draft Conventions which have been established by the ICRC for the Stockholm Conference, for the protection of prisoners of war, the wounded and sick in armies in the field, and of civil populations in time of war.

While the ICRC cannot be interested in those activities of UNO which have a political bearing, it is however concerned in the work of the "specialized agencies", and in particular of the

International Organization for Refugees (see below), the World Health Organization (1), and the International Labour Organization. The ICRC also follows with great interest the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on prevention of discrimination and protection of Minorities. Lastly, the ICRC carefully studies the work of certain bodies which are directly connected with the Economic and Social Council, especially the United Nations Appeal for Children (UNAC), and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

In view of the community of interest existing between the ICRC and the United Nations Organization on certain points, the Committee will continue to follow up these matters and the progress of the bodies concerned, and it will examine, if necessary, the appropriate measures to be taken to develop present relations.

IV. Relations between the ICRC, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR) and the Preparatory Commission of the International Organization for REFUGEES (IRO)

As from 1942, the ICRC was led to devote close attention to the persecution of Jews in occupied countries, and thus to intervene in behalf of persons who might have benefited by the protection of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR), if direct action by this organization in the countries concerned had not been prevented by the war.

Circumstances did not, of course, preclude the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees from taking especial interest in conditions for this category of victims, whom they had been mandated to protect. Close contact was, as a matter of course, established between the two bodies (ICRC and ICR). While meetings between the directors were difficult, on account of the War, an extensive correspondence was carried on.

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 (1) See Supplementary Report on the Committee's activities from July 1, 1947 to June 30, 1948.

The Intergovernmental Committee was thus kept constantly informed of the situation of the Jews in occupied countries, and of the result of the steps undertaken by the ICRC to help them. This exchange of correspondence further enabled both organizations to seek together a solution of the difficulties encountered by the ICRC. The Intergovernmental Committee often had occasion to support the ICRC's endeavours with the Allied authorities.

Generally speaking, it may be said that this co-operation, which was greatly desired by both sides, was extremely useful; it enabled the ICRC in particular to discuss important problems direct with the directors of the Intergovernmental Committee. The latter was thus perfectly informed of all aspects of the ICRC's work in behalf of Jews, and this gave the co-operation between the two bodies a unity of purpose and method which proved most valuable.

The relations of the ICRC with the Intergovernmental Committee lasted until this body was wound up; they were particularly close during the years 1945 and 1946, as mentioned in the General Report of the ICRC. (1) At that time, the Intergovernmental Committee was able to resume its plenary meetings, and did not fail to invite the ICRC to appoint observers.

In 1947, the Intergovernmental Committee was replaced by the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organization (FCIRO), which took over the duties of the said Committee, and which was further instructed by the General Assembly of UNO to ensure the protection of many other categories of refugees scattered throughout the world in consequence of the war.

The ICRC at once took steps to establish the closest possible relations with the Preparatory Commission, with a view to submitting to them the many questions put by refugees to the ICRC delegates. After the end of the war, the refugees had generally turned to these delegates for help; the latter had, unfortunately, but rarely the means of giving such assistance, and referred applicants to the appropriate organizations which were in a position to do so. There was, however, some delay in establishing relations, since the Preparatory Commission first had to go through a period of organization, during which it had difficulty in dealing with large-scale problems.

Since the beginning of 1948, contacts have been more frequent, but are not yet quite satisfactory. The Preparatory Commission is a far more complex organization than was the Intergovernmental Committee; it has a series of departments, each of which covers a well-defined field, and this fact renders it difficult to submit problems of a general nature.

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(1) See Vol. I, pp. 663-664 and 670.

The discussion of many questions which have already been gone into with this organization has been, perforce, limited to the purely practical aspect and to the study of individual cases and applications submitted to the ICRC by refugees.

In June 1948, periodical study meetings were agreed upon in principle, and though it is to be feared that these meetings too will be confined to discussions of individual cases between specialists, they will doubtless lead to closer relations between the ICRC and the Preparatory Commission. It would certainly be desirable to have more thorough and methodical co-operation between the two organisations. The ICRC is, much against its will, overwhelmed with applications from refugees who are generally ineligible for assistance by the Preparatory Commission, and it would appreciate the opportunity of examining with the Commission the wider issues which are bound up with these applications. In this connection, the experience and advice of the ICRC, which has considerable knowledge of relief work and is exclusively concerned with the humanitarian aspect of the question, might conceivably be useful to the Preparatory Commission.

V. Other Private International Organizations

For several years, the ICRC has maintained regular and close relations with the following major international organizations:

World Council of Churches
 Caritas Catholica internationalis
 O.S.E. Union for Health and Hygiene among Jewish Populations
 International Union for Child Welfare
 American Friends' Welfare Committee
 World Alliance of Y.M.C.A.
 World Alliance of Y.W.C.A.
 World Student Relief
 International Centre for Relief to Civil Populations

Close liaison was established already during the recent War with several of the above organizations, especially in the field of intellectual relief for prisoners of war. After the close of hostilities and particularly since the autumn of 1945, the ICRC has had regular meetings with representatives of these bodies, with the aim of (a) discussing post-war relief questions, (b) exchanging information and (c) pooling experiences. Discussion usually bears on questions of relief, customs and transport franchise and priority, supervision and equitable issue of supplies, and publicity campaigns

in behalf of victims of war. The meetings offer opportunities of bringing forward appeals received and of making short reports on missions undertaken by the organizations, and the conclusions to be drawn.

Valuable and effective relations have thus been established and maintained between some ten organizations which cover a very wide field of international welfare, and which, while pursuing separate aims, have much in common. Possible causes of friction, which might well arise without such regular contact are thus eliminated. These meetings were started during the war, largely at the ICRC's suggestion, and have been continued at the urgent request of other non-Red Cross international organizations. The role of the ICRC still appears influential in these meetings; its participation has led to a wider and more impartial conception of relief work, and this conception has increasing repercussions on methods of work of member associations.

Two useful results of this co-operations were (1) the joint world appeals launched at Christmas in 1945, 1946 and 1947 in behalf of children, civil populations and all victims of the second World War, and (2) the setting up of an association for the promotion of broadcasting, in which the League of Red Cross Societies also participates.
