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Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross  
on its Relations with the United Nations Organization

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Relations of the International Committee of the  
Red Cross with the United Nations Organization

In the course of the last four years the International Committee of the Red Cross has established working relations with the United Nations Organization and some of its specialized agencies. Their work in common was in some cases necessitated by the traditional activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) : in others UNO or its specialized agencies called upon the ICRC services for solving particular problems.

I.

Relief to Palestine Refugees

In 1948 at the close of the summer Count Bernadotte, United Nations Mediator for Palestine, launched an urgent appeal to several Governments for the immediate despatch of extensive relief supplies to Palestine refugees. The ICRC had then been in the country for several months and, in addition to its intervention with the belligerents which had resulted in their adhesion to the Geneva Conventions, had commenced distributing to war victims the relief supplies received from certain National Red Cross Societies and from private donors; but the needs were immense and called for government action. Prompted by the Mediator the United Nations Emergency Relief action was organised in order to co-ordinate the governments' efforts. Count Bernadotte's successor, having ascertained that in spite of all efforts the refugees' needs were far from being covered, and that the undertaking would be a failure unless it was carried out with much greater resources, proposed to set up a large-scale action. The costs were to be assumed by the United Nations, by appropriate budgetary arrangements, over a minimum period of 9 months. Private humanitarian institutions were to be asked to distribute the relief supplies provided by this means.

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At the end of October 1948, the Secretary-General of the United Nations asked the ICRC and the League whether they would, in principle, be prepared to assume the responsibility of the distribution to refugees of the relief supplied by the United Nations.

Preliminary Negotiations.

The ICRC, which had been concerned for months with the Palestinian refugee question, had every reason to be gratified at the prospect of collaborating with such an eminently humanitarian action. The Committee was however desirous of obtaining certain guarantees to safeguard the traditional role of neutral intermediary which it had assumed in Palestine since May 1948, and which in view of the evolution of the political situation it saw no prospect of relinquishing in a near future.

On November 1, 1948 the President of the International Committee, while giving his general agreement for a joint action, asked for the following guarantees :

- (a) for the safeguard of the independence and autonomy of the ICRC in its action, and consequently the absence of supervision of its activities during the operation,
- (b) for the continuation of the humanitarian work of the ICRC according to its traditional principles,
- (c) for the approval of the States concerned to the relief action on behalf of the refugees.

On November 10, 1948 the ICRC proposed a plan, under which UNO was to deal with the purchase and despatch of relief supplies, while the ICRC and the other agencies concerned were to organise distribution in the field, and make periodical reports to UNO on the employment of the supplies placed at their disposal.

By a Resolution, which was unanimously adopted on November 19, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations

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requested the Secretary-General :

"to take all necessary steps to extend aid to Palestine refugees and to establish such administrative organization as may be required for this purpose, inviting the assistance of the appropriate agencies of the several Governments, the specialized agencies of the United Nations, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and other voluntary agencies it being recognised that the participation of voluntary organizations in the relief plan would in no ways derogate from the principle of impartiality on the basis of which the assistance of these organizations is being solicited".

Contract for collaboration between the United Nations and the International Committee.

In accordance with this Resolution the Secretary General instructed the Director of UNRPR (United Nations Relief for Palestine) to conclude working agreements with the agencies called upon to collaborate in the relief programme. The contract to determine the bases of the work of UNRPR and the ICRC was signed on 16 December 1948, and included the following essential stipulations :

"The United Nations agree to recognise the International Committee of the Red Cross as an independent and autonomous organisation which undertakes to effect, under its sole responsibility, the distribution of relief supplies received from the United Nations Organizations, as donors, in the territory assigned.

"It is agreed and approved by the United Nations Organization that the distribution of such relief supplies effected in the field by the International Committee of the Red Cross, in complete independence, will not in any way place it in a subordinate position with respect

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to the United Nations and that it will not be required by the latter organisation to carry out any other task than those specified above.

"The International Committee of the Red Cross agrees ... that in the equitable distribution of relief it will insofar as possible take into account the numerical importance of the respective communities to be assisted on the basis of minimum essential need, without distinction as to race, colour, creed or political belief and so as to ensure that one group of refugees will not be favoured to the prejudice of any other group and that the requirements of those in greater need will have priority over the requirements of those in lesser need.

"It is understood that the International Committee of the Red Cross must continue to act, between the parties in Palestine, as a neutral intermediary, especially for prisoners of war. This requires that it maintain in the eyes of each and in all circumstances, present and future, its position outside of all political contingencies".

On the basis of this contract the ICRC concluded agreements for collaboration with the various Specialized Agencies of the United Nations, in particular UNICEF.

End of the Relief Programme.

During the Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly the Ad hoc Political Committee requested the President of the International Committee to express the views of the Geneva organisation. M. Paul Ruegger explained that the traditions of the International Committee made its intervention a duty in troubled times, while at the same time it was always anxious to hand over its work to others as soon as conditions became stable, and the period of construction and resettlement had begun.

As however the condition of the refugees did not show sufficient improvement, the programme, which had first been drawn

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up for 9 months, was prolonged at the instance of the ICRC until March 31, 1950. At this date the relief action was to have been taken over by a new organisation specially adapted to the new circumstances, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWAPR); but for technical reasons this latter was not ready in time. The Secretary General of the United Nations thereupon invited the ICRC to continue its relief action until 30 April 1950, and the President of the ICRC replied, agreeing to continue the work on the same terms for the month of April, as a new pledge of his solicitude for the case of the Palestinian refugees.

## II.

### Repatriation of Greek children. (1)

The problem of displaced Greek children came before the United Nations General Assembly at its Third Session. A resolution was adopted unanimously by the Assembly in Paris in the following terms :

#### "THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"RECOMMENDS the return to Greece of Greek children at present away from their homes when the children, their father or mother or, in his or her absence, their closest relative, express a wish to that effect;

"INVITES all the Members of the United Nations and other States on whose territory these children are to be found to take the necessary measures for implementation of the present recommendation:

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(1) See Joint Report of the League and the ICRC on the repatriation of Greek children.

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"INSTRUCTS the Secretary General to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to organise and ensure liaison with the national Red Cross organisations of the States concerned with a view to empowering the national Red Cross organisations to adopt measures in the respective countries for implementing the present recommendation".

The international Red Cross organisations, which for several years had dealt with the problem of reuniting divided families, could not evade the United Nations appeal. On 17 December 1948 the first meeting took place between the representatives of UNO on the one hand and the ICRC and the League on the other. At this meeting the independence of the two international Red Cross institutions in the carrying out of the task entrusted to them was fully recognised. It remained understood that they were to submit joint periodical reports to UNO on the work.

Referring to the resolution quoted above, the Secretary-General of the United Nations addressed the following message on 11 January 1949 to the Governments of Greece and the reception countries as well as to the Committee and the League :

"I have the honour officially to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to establish the necessary contacts, on the one hand, with the Greek Government and Red Cross, and, on the other, with the Governments and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the countries in which Greek children reside, so as to examine the means of implementing this resolution".

Approaches made to Red Cross Societies and Governments formed the subject of a First Report which was submitted to the Secretary General on 5 October 1949. Basing itself on the facts given in this Report, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a new resolution on 18 November 1949 in terms very similar to those of the first one. It instructed the Secretary General to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to continue their efforts in this humanitarian cause and to lend them all appropriate assistance

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in carrying out their task. It further urged all the members of the United Nations, and other States harbouring the Greek children, to make all necessary arrangements, in consultation and cooperation with the International Red Cross organisations, for the early return to their homes of the children.

Notwithstanding the continued efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League, the practical results achieved were negligible, only Yugoslavia having consented to proceed with a few hundred repatriations. On 9 June 1950 the Presidents of these two organisations addressed a telegram to the Secretary General of the United Nations informing him that in their opinion the matter could not be handled without the intervention of the Governments themselves.

On 18 September 1950 the ICRC and the League presented their Second Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations requesting him to put it before the General Assembly. The report concluded as follows :

"Deeply regretting that better practical results have not hitherto been secured despite the steps they have repeatedly undertaken, the ICRC and the League realise that they are now unable to pursue, through their own channels, the general execution of their mission.

"Without wishing to judge the causes of a situation which it is not in their power to alter, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies are obliged to insist on the fact that they must contemplate renouncing the mandate which they had accepted from the United Nations, unless the United Nations and the countries concerned with the problem of the displaced Greek children afford them the cooperation which is essential in the discharge of their task, a cooperation which the General Assembly of the United Nations had provided for in point 2 of its resolution of 18 November 1949, which to this day has unfortunately not been put into practice".



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Noting the suggestions contained in this Report, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the following resolution on 1 December 1950 :

"THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"Establishes a Standing Committee, to be composed of the representatives of Peru, the Philippines and Sweden, to act in consultation with the Secretary-General, and to consult with the representatives of the States concerned, with a view to the early repatriation of the children;

"Requests the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to co-operate with the Standing Committee".

In spite of this Committee's attempts to approach the Governments concerned, there was no appreciable alteration of the situation; and 17 October 1951 the ICRC and the League presented their Third Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations stating that owing to lack of cooperation they wished to renounce the mandate which they had accepted. On November 1951, the Ad hoc Political Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations sent an invitation to all Governments of reception countries, to which only the Government of Czechoslovakia gave a favourable reply. On January 22, at the request of the Secretary General of UNO, representatives of the ICRC and the League were present at a session of the Standing Committee for the repatriation of Greek children, at which the Czechoslovak Delegate stated that in the opinion of his Government the problem of Greek children in Czechoslovakia should be reconsidered by means of meetings between the Committee and the League and the Czechoslovakian Red Cross.

The meetings which took place in Prague from 8-21 April 1952 led to no result. On 6 May 1952 the ICRC and the League addressed a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations containing the Final Protocol of the Prague meetings.

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III.

Repatriation of Greek Military Personnel

In his letter of 6 December 1950 to the International Committee of the Red Cross the Secretary-General of the United Nations had communicated the text of the Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 1 December 1950 concerning the repatriation of Greek military personnel retained in captivity in certain European countries. In this Resolution the General Assembly recommended the repatriation of all those among the members of the Greek armed forces who expressed the wish to be repatriated, and instructed the Secretary-General to request the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies to ensure liaison with the national Red Cross organizations of the States concerned, with a view to implementing the present Resolution.

Continuing the mission, which it had started in 1948 with a view to helping the victims of disturbances in Greece, the ICRC requested the Greek Red Cross on 8 April 1951 to furnish it with all possible information on the countries which were harbouring ex-army personnel together with the approximate number of them in each country. The Greek Red Cross provided lists containing the names of 148 members of the Greek armed forces, which the ICRC sent to the national Red Cross Societies of the countries concerned, requesting them to help these persons return to their homes, and also to aid those who, although not figuring on the list, might still be in those countries. With the exception of the Yugoslav Red Cross, which undertook the necessary Enquiries in each case, no Red Cross Society replied to the request; but in connection with steps taken by the Committee in September 1951 the Polish Red Cross stated verbally that to its knowledge none of the persons in question had been retained against their will, and that consequently any Greek military personnel who might be in Poland could, if they wished, return to their country.

On 24 April 1952 these facts were communicated to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his personal information.

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IV

Measures to bring the internment of ex-army  
personnel to a close

At its Fifth Session the United Nations General Assembly considered the problem of ex-army personnel who, after internment for years in various countries, were still deprived of their freedom and could not return to their homes. In the hope of finding a solution which would be acceptable to all the States concerned, a Resolution was adopted in December 1950, under which the Secretary-General was requested to establish an Ad Hoc Commission composed of three qualified and impartial persons chosen by the International Red Cross or, failing that, by the Secretary-General, with a view to settling the question of the prisoners of war in a purely humanitarian spirit and on terms acceptable to all the Governments concerned.

The Resolution added that all Governments still having control of such persons were called upon to act in conformity with the recognized standards of international conduct and with the international agreements and Conventions, and to that end to publish and transmit to the Secretary-General before 30 April 1951 :

- (a) The names of such prisoners still held by them, the reasons for which they were still detained and the places in which they were detained;
- (b) The names of prisoners who had died while under their control as well as the date and cause of death, and the manner and place of burial in each case.

As this Resolution was not voted unanimously, the ICRC was forced to decline the invitation made to it in January 1951 with a view to its designating members of the proposed Commission. When replying to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Committee pointed out that "it could undertake an enquiry only if a specific mandate had been given it in advance by the Conventions, or by an ad hoc agreement between the interested parties". In view of the fact that the General Assembly had adopted the Resolution proposed by the Third Commission despite the opposition of certain States, the International

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Committee of the Red Cross concluded that it could not take part in the designation of the members of the Ad Hoc Commission.

V.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and  
the activity of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO)

The working relations between the ICRC and the IRO exemplify the manner and circumstances of the Committee's cooperation with a specialised agency of the United Nations with a view to settling problems of common interest.

Certificates of Capture.

In order to receive help from IRO, displaced persons had in certain cases to give proof that their activity during the war had been of such a nature as to grant them IRO protection. Ex-prisoners of war unable to produce any written evidence applied to Geneva; and a certificate of capture issued by the ICRC on the basis of information found in the card-index of the Central Agency for Prisoners of War was the only document which made it possible for them to receive IRO help when emigrating. Up to December 31, 1951 18,800 certificates of capture were issued.

Travel documents.

Travel documents issued by the ICRC are non-official and temporary documents, delivered to persons who do not possess any identification papers enabling them to return to their native country or emigrate to another one. Measures taken at the London Conference in October 1946 only concerned those persons who came within the IRO's mandate, so that there were a number of "ineligible" refugees and stateless persons to whom these "London documents" (as they were called) could not be issued. In many cases only ICRC travel documents enabled these persons to travel

to another reception country. This was the case with refugees in Italy, India, Egypt, Spain and Trieste. It was at the IRO's request that the Services of the International Committee of the Red Cross issuing these documents were maintained, e.g. in Rome.

Transmission of requests.

In its capacity as a permanent organisation open to all without discrimination, the ICRC has often received applications from individuals, and even for Governments, anxious to obtain the benefits of IRO assistance. These requests have been considered and passed on by the ICRC. In certain particularly interesting cases joint enquiries were made.

Role of ICRC Delegates.

In countries where the IRO has no permanent Delegation, and has closed its offices before clearing up the situation of the persons it protects, the intervention of the ICRC representative has been requested. This was the case notably in Bombay, Shanghai, Beirut, Cairo and recently in Madrid.

The points stated give a very brief resumé of the working cooperation between the ICRC and the IRO. It is most essential to draw attention to the unceasing efforts made by the International Committee to give a wider conception to the plight of the refugee and his claim for assistance by the international community.

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