

**Report
of the German Red Cross
of the GDR
to the XXIV International
Red Cross Conference,
Manila, 1981**

I. Introduction

The German Red Cross of the German Democratic Republic (GRC of the GDR) was established by decree of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic on 23 October, 1952.

The GRC of the GDR is a mass organization in which all citizens regardless of sex, age, professional and social status, political conviction or world outlook can participate, provided he or she has reached the age of 14 and recognizes the organization's constitution. The task of the GRC of the GDR is to assist the National Health Service in maintaining, promoting and restoring the people's health; to assure the training of first aid workers for rendering proper first aid in accidents, sports and cultural events, mass meetings and public emergencies; to organize a wide medical education of the population and the ambulance service; to observe the obligations which derive from the Geneva Conventions and from international tasks. The GRC of the GDR is a statutory corporation, its presidium having its seat in Dresden.

II. Organization and Structure

On account of the application dated 19 Oct. 1954 the GRC of the GDR was recognized as a National Red Cross Society by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In its circular No. 405 of November 9th, 1954 the ICRC notified this official recognition and legalization to all the other Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies. The admission of the GRC of the GDR to the League of Red Cross Societies was decided on by the Executive Committee on November 12th, 1954 and was unanimously confirmed by the Board of Governors which met on the occasion of the XIX International Red Cross Conference in New Delhi in October 1957.

As proposed by the GRC of the GDR, the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic adopted the "Decree on the Adherence of the German Democratic Republic to the Four Geneva Conventions relative to the Protection of Victims of War of 12 August, 1949."

Complying with the regional structure of the GDR, the GRC of the GDR structure rests on the principle of democratic centralism. The GRC of the GDR embraces at present 16 county organizations, 220 district organizations and 13,600 basic branches. The supreme body is the Congress of the GRC of the GDR to be convened as a rule every five years. All participants elect the presidium and the Central Auditing Commission.

Composed of 71 members and 17 candidates, the Presidium runs all actions of the GRC of the GDR taken between the Congresses. At the constituent session it elects the President and the Vice Presidents, appointing the Secretary General for a term of office. Generally, the Presidium meets twice a year. Corresponding in its composition to the social structure of the membership of the GRC of the GDR, the Presidium is represented by physicians, nurses, workers, office workers, cooperative farmers, teachers, young people, housewives and old-age pensioners. For consultations on special matters there are advisory commissions to the Presidium.

The working body of the Presidium is the Secretariat of the Presidium which is staffed by paid, full-time working members and placed under the control of the Secretary General. Analogously, it is the County Delegate Conference or District Delegate Conference that is convened every five years as well, representing the supreme body of the county or the district. It elects the County Committee or the District Committee, the delegates to the Congress or to the County Delegate Conference and the Auditing Commission. In analogy to the Presidium, an elected bureau runs all activities between the sessions of the respective Committee. The working body of the Committee is the Secretariat staffed with paid, full-time working members.

The most important foundation of the Red Cross work is formed by 13,600 branches that are present in all spheres of social life, in industrial and building enterprises, in health and social welfare facilities, at colleges and technical schools, in institutions, agricultural cooperative farms as well as in urban and rural housing areas.

All elected bodies are accountable to their voters. That way the work done by any individual member can be effective up to the supreme bodies of the GRC of the GDR, with the decision made by the higher body being binding to all lower ones.

III. Membership and Finances

On December 31, 1980 the membership of the GRC of the GDR numbered 633,000, among them 118,000 physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses and other medical staff.

Moreover, 570,000 friends give moral support and pay regular membership fees.

To do practical Red Cross work, the required economic and financial means are available.

These funds cover membership and friendship fees, private donations and takings from a public lottery organized in favour of Red Cross activities.

In the GDR the Red Cross is solely responsible for the ambulance service that is financed by the National Insurance Scheme.

IV. Current Activities

1. Disaster control

Based on the branches, active members are grouped into First Aiders squads and platoons corresponding to mobile units as regards training, uniforms and equipment. These First Aiders formations of the GRC of the GDR are employed for disaster control and engaged in civil defence activities coordinated by state authorities.

Furthermore, all members of the GRC of the GDR are trained as first aid workers and provided with first aid kits. For disaster control the Presidium's mobile disaster relief unit is available that includes, among others, a large canteen and an emergency hospital.

2. International disaster relief

From 1977 through 1980, a total of 37 relief consignments worth of more than 15 million marks were sent to 35 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in order to render aid to those suffering from the consequences of natural disasters.

3. Relief to victims of armed conflicts

A total of 22 consignments worth of 3.6 million marks were sent to 16 societies in support of the peoples fighting for their national liberation, and to help overcome the consequences of armed conflicts.

4. Activities within the Development Program

The GRC of the GDR makes its contribution to the development of Red Cross societies in young nation states. On the basis of bilateral relations and within the Development program of the League of Red Cross societies, 70 consignments were dispatched to 54 societies for aid covering capital goods, teaching aids, and educational materials worth of 4.4 million marks.

To train medium-level medical staff of the Red Cross society of the People's Republic of Congo, 23,510 marks were provided. Medical teams of the GRC of the GDR were active in Kampuchea and Ethiopia.

5. Activities in the field of health protection

First aid and health education

It is the primary task of the GRC of the GDR to support efficiently and on a voluntary and unselfish basis the public system of health

protection in assuring basic health care. The Red Cross primarily concentrates on first aid, prophylaxis and special social tasks.

As regards first aid in accidents and in sudden cases of illness affecting working people at enterprises, there are special legal provisions. All the first aid workers needed for that are trained by the GRC of the GDR. To illustrate this, 500,000 participants were recorded in 1980 within the scope of public training. Additionally, there were 46,000 different training courses within the GRC of the GDR which were attended by 1.25 million people.

For training and further training courses, some 15,000 Red Cross instructors are available.

Ninety percent of the Red Cross members have the knowledge and skills in order to be employed as first aid workers. In 1980 Red Cross members rendered first aid in 2.5 million cases. Red Cross members are increasingly supervising the satisfaction of sanitary requirements, furthering the protection of the natural environment and taking steps of health education and prophylaxis.

Special services

The tasks of the GRC of the GDR also include health care for holiday-makers and pastime ramblers by the sea, at lakes and in the mountains. Rescue swimmers and climbing accident rescue teams have, besides their qualification as first aid workers, special knowledge of water safety and rescue operations in the mountains and in snow. In 1980 they saved 709 people from drowning and 186 from accidents in the mountains.

Red Cross blood donation service

To save human lives, blood preserves are needed to an ever growing extent. The GRC of the GDR has launched a campaign to address citizens for blood donation free of charge. Over the past few years the percentage of unpaid Red Cross blood donations has risen continuously which helps satisfy the steadily growing demand for blood.

At present, 50 percent of the blood needed are gained from gratuitous blood donations.

In gratitude to, and appreciation of, the blood donation, the Presidium of the GRC of the GDR confers on the donors a blood donation badge for five, ten, fifteen, and twenty Red Cross blood donations.

Health care and social services

A basic humanitarian concern of all Red Cross members of the GDR is to give aid to those people who are dependent on the support of

others due to old age or disease. Their social and medical attention is closely linked to the public health and social welfare system of the GDR, the people's solidarity organization and the GRC of the GDR. The number of service hours in the Red Cross health care and social services increased considerably over the last few years. Compared to 1975 when 1.5 million hrs were spent to care for elderly and diseased citizens, the members of the GRC of the GDR spent already 4.1 million hrs in doing so in 1980. Even the Young first aiders give support by doing small-scale duties like shopping and others. They can be encountered in any place where needy people live. Special support is given to physically and mentally handicapped children in their holiday activities.

Red Cross Railway Station Service

Ninety three railway stations of the GDR and 15 border crossing points are staffed with members of the Railway Station Service of the GRC of the GDR who are at the people's disposal day and night to give them medical and social aid. Special attention is paid to the care for mother and child, to the welfare of old and handicapped people and the children's transfer in the holiday season. They assist mothers in preparing the food for their babies and infants, accompany the handicapped to the train, help them change the trains, and hand out tea for the children on their journey to holiday camps.

In 1980 the members of the Railway Station Service put to record a total of 1.1 million social aid services and 185,420 first aid cases in accidents and unexpected illness.

Ambulance service and Fast Medical Aid

In the GDR, the Red Cross is solely responsible for ambulance service. It is not only ready for service in accidents but takes over the transfer to outpatient treatment, to dialysis and other special treatments. All ambulance trips require a physician's permit and are free of charge within the scope of the common social insurance scheme and the basic care for public health.

In 1980 a total of 4 million patients were transported by the ambulance service.

Since 1976 the Fast Medical Aid has been systematically set up and has particularly proved vital in road casualties and very serious diseases.

The setup of a FM radio network of the GRC of the GDR has been completed in all districts.

6. Activities of the youth

The young members of the GRC of the GDR aged from 14 to 25 years are united in the basic branches together with the older members. Enjoying equal rights they perform managerial functions, take part in the settlement of tasks and learn from the experience of the older members who in turn, are often inspired by their juvenile zeal.

Pupils of the 4th to 7th forms of the polytechnical secondary schools have the opportunity of doing practical work in groups of Young Aiders, Young Rescue Swimmers and Young Mountain Rescuers within the scope of the Ernst Thälmann Young Pioneer Organization.

They are acquiring knowledge of and skills in first aid and health education, preparing for the membership in the GRC of the GDR. Late in 1980 there was a total of 4,500 groups numbering 74,000 members.

They render first aid in sports, plays and hiking, look after the observance of hygienic attitudes of their class-mates, keep order and discipline.

7. Activities to propagate the Geneva conventions and Red Cross principles

Propagating the Geneva conventions and Red Cross principles is an integral part of training and further training of the German Red Cross of the GDR. Underlying principles of the Red Cross and the humanitarian international law are made clear in all training courses of first aid instruction.

In the further training of members and officials in 1979 and 1980, the supplemental protocols to the Geneva conventions were also considered to be an advancement of the humanitarian international law. Relevant brochures were published numbering 15,000 and 4,000 copies. The monthly of the GRC of the GDR published respective article sequels in 1978 and 1980.

8. Activities to safeguard and encourage peace

The basic concern of the educational and practical activities of the GRC of the GDR has been the promotion, maintenance and strengthening of peaceful and friendly relations between the peoples since it was founded.

That's why the Presidium of the GRC of the GDR and its peace committee set up to support these activities consider it a primary guideline that the Program of Action of the Red Cross adopted at the XXIII International Red Cross Conference is implemented as a factor of peace.

To do this, an extensive and many-sided advertising and educational assessment of the action program was made inside and outside the organization.

The members of the Red Cross of the GDR have supported various peace-encouraging actions like international solidarity, development aid and disaster relief. The extension and intensification of productive contacts, the friendly meetings of officials and members, the exchange of youth delegations, the participation in international youth camps, contests and film festivals have been activities that encourage peace. There is a close cooperation with the GDR Peace Council.

9. Information and publicity

The Presidium of the GRC of the GDR issues two periodicals a month: The monthly "German Red Cross of the GDR" with a volume of 65,000 copies, and the officials' monthly "Our Standpoint" with 33,000 copies. Both periodicals are devoted to problems of organization, sanitary items, contributions to a healthful way of life and contain special sections for young Red Cross members. There has been a close cooperation with papers and periodicals of other social organizations, with the GDR broadcasting and TV companies.