

WORLD RED CROSS DAY

“ You and Your Environment ”

On several occasions *International Review* has referred to environment problems. It devoted an article¹ to the United Nations Conference in June 1972 at Stockholm, which met to examine those problems and to adopt common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the environment. The conference showed how necessary it is today for nations to co-operate extensively. As the United Nations Secretary-General said in his opening speech:

... Our problems are serious and our challenges are many, but environmental concerns are causing men to look beyond the walls of what they hitherto considered to be impregnable national castles. The realization that the earth and its resources are not infinite is inevitably bringing about a reshuffling of objectives and priorities. Growth is slowly being reoriented—towards less material goals in the affluent countries, towards more rational development in the less industrialized world. Exploration of environmental issues is opening new opportunities to the developing countries . . .

As we now consider the choices before us, we must realize we are not faced with many separate problems, but with different aspects of a single overall problem: the survival and prosperity of all men and women and their harmonious development, physical as well as spiritual, in peace with each other and with nature . . .

Red Cross and the environment

At that conference—which was attended by delegates of 113 States—the Red Cross movement was represented by the League,

¹ See *International Review*, August 1972.

which for some time has been concerned with these problems and has been helping to arouse the enthusiasm necessary for the reforms which must be undertaken. Recently, a working party set up by the League, and comprising experts from eight National Red Cross Societies, met in Geneva to examine and define possible Red Cross action for the protection and improvement of the environment.

Many National Societies, long ago or recently, have worked out programmes relating to the environment; others have only just made their initial moves in the same direction or are preparing to do so having now recognized the need. In addition, some are forming regional groups where a particular environment problem is of common concern to them. In the League publication "Panorama" (1973, No. 1), for instance, we read that Red Cross action to protect and conserve the Baltic Sea coast and tributary waters is under study by Red Cross Societies of countries bordering the Sea.

Representatives of the National Societies of Denmark, Finland, the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, Poland and Sweden, plus an observer from Norway, met in Helsinki last November to discuss a proposal by the Finnish Red Cross for a joint Red Cross Baltic Sea project which would give a major part of the action to young people of the region. Participants voted to continue study of the plan at national level and to reconvene in August for a second, extended, planning session which would include environment specialists and young people.

The Finnish Red Cross proposal is a follow-up to a League Board of Governors' resolution, adopted in Mexico City in 1971, which called for greater involvement of National Societies in national environmental action and stressed youth's interest in such programmes.

The Societies attending the Helsinki meeting exchanged information on their current or projected participation in national efforts to protect and improve the environment. The Finnish Red Cross has already set up a National Commission for environmental protection, composed of the Red Cross plus Finland's three largest environment organizations. It has drawn up a national Red Cross plan of action and model programmes for five main target areas: water; air and noise abatement; environmental poisons; waste disposal; and recreational uses of the environment. The Society hopes to launch the first

of these programmes shortly, so they will peak around World Red Cross Day (8 May), with its theme this year "You and Your Environment: Priority for Red Cross".

The Finnish Red Cross foresees "a very different year of activities" ahead of it in 1973, but predicts that environmental programmes will prove more than a short-term project for Red Cross and gradually develop into one of its regular services.

World Red Cross Day 1973

It is therefore easy to understand why the theme proposed for World Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Day this year refers to the environment. Its title is *You and Your Environment: Priority for Red Cross* and draws attention by the direct and global manner in which it indicates the situation of the Red Cross vis-à-vis the danger which the world now realizes is threatening.

The League has prepared documentary material of a new design: it includes messages from various notables on the occasion of the World Day, information on nature conservation coupled with a more up-to-date and fuller portrait of the Red Cross, and illustrations by Walt Disney Productions exclusively for National Societies which, being unusual for the Red Cross, catch the eye of the public.

We wish full success to this World Day 1973, in the same manner as Mr. J. Barroso, Chairman of the League Board of Governors, in his message on that occasion, which he concludes by saying:

... We are part of a community within which nothing should leave us indifferent. The problems of one nation inevitably have their repercussions on other nations. Our epoch should therefore be characterised by actions of solidarity with regard to any project and any task aimed at maintaining an ecological balance, which is imperative if human life is to be preserved.

However, we shall achieve nothing unless the peoples of the world adopt a new attitude, a way of thinking and a new conception of our societies so that the necessity for each individual to safeguard his environment, on which he is so closely dependent, becomes deeply rooted in the minds of all.

May universal brotherhood and freedom of mind, imbued with a deep feeling for mankind, lead us to struggle effectively against the

negative forces which are today destroying our world, this world which must be transformed into a place where life is worth living, to ensure that man's future will be abounding in promise.

The Red Cross is already active in this field, and there is no doubt that its 230 million members throughout the world will do everything in their power to co-operate through their National Society in the measures taken in all countries to improve the human environment. I am convinced that this is further proof of the fact that our movement, over a hundred years old, not only carries on its traditional tasks with enthusiasm, but also closely follows the evolution of our world so that it can, with the maximum efficiency, accomplish the mission entrusted to it by its founder, namely the prevention of human suffering.

DISSEMINATION OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

Information continues to reach us from National Societies on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions in their countries; the latest to be received is given below by way of information.

U.S.S.R.

The Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR has sent the ICRC a communication the main points of which are summarized as follows:

- I. The very important role played by Russia in the past and by the Soviet Union today in the formulation of rules for the purpose of alleviating the condition of victims of war, of ensuring the application of such rules and providing for penal sanctions should they be violated is very well known.