

UNITED STATES

The Annual Convention of the American National Red Cross (3,100 local chapters, representing several million paid staff and voluntary workers) was held in May in Portland, Oregon. This was a kind of nationwide family gathering, bringing together nearly 3,000 Red Cross officials, divided into working groups each containing anything between 500 and 1,000 members. It was the National Society's supreme assembly where important issues were voted and whose agenda was composed of items relating to organization, finance, exchanges of ideas and aspirations, amid a fluttering of banners and outward manifestations of deep and motivated enthusiasm.

Few National Societies are faced daily with problems as huge as those raised at Portland. Few organizations, in order to discharge their mandate, are capable of attracting so many volunteers who form "the heart of the Society's activities" and who "help to alleviate the wounds and frustration, the solitude and agony of human beings scarred by distress".

More than three million messages are exchanged every year, through the intermediary of the American Red Cross, between American servicemen scattered in all corners of the world and their families. The complex network in use may serve as a model for communication techniques and swiftness of exchange.

A large number of natural disasters (floods, typhoons, etc.) occur in a single year over widely scattered parts of the United States, and in such cases the National Red Cross may have to provide assistance to 80,000 families every year.

It has been calculated that nationwide there is one blood transfusion every 17 seconds. In effect, that corresponds to 4 million donors and a blood collection programme running to 80 million dollars a year.

The American Red Cross provides aid not only to Americans but also to victims and persons needing assistance outside the United States. It has responded to the various appeals by the League of Red Cross

Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross by sending gifts to the value of more than 2 million dollars during the fiscal year 1974-1975. This year's Annual Convention again reflected the National Society's work and its faith in the role of the Red Cross.

The President of the ICRC Executive Board, Mr. Roger Gallopin, was one of the official guests. This invitation was undoubtedly in recognition of his forty years' service in Red Cross work, but it was also a sign of the determination on the part of the American Red Cross leaders to bring home to their members, often involved in their own local obligations, the significance of international aid and of Red Cross action for the protection of the victims of natural disasters and of the victims of war.

As the United States Government and the American National Red Cross give the ICRC much-needed support, Mr. Gallopin sought to show, giving examples of what was actually being done in Chile, Angola and Lebanon, how this material support was transformed into humanitarian assistance, or in other words how the money provided by States and National Societies saved human lives.

At the final session, Mr. Gallopin was presented with the highest American Red Cross distinction, its Special Award, for his "long, faithful and distinguished service and outstanding achievement in directing and carrying out the humanitarian work of the ICRC throughout the world".

This distinction was welcomed with great pleasure by the ICRC, for whom it is a powerful stimulus for the pursuit of its humanitarian activities at the present time in various parts of the world.