

International Red Cross Assistance in Indo-China

In our January 1973 issue, we announced the formation by the ICRC and the League of the Indo-China Operational Group (IOG) for the pooling of Red Cross resources and the co-ordinating of plans in order to ensure the most effective aid to the war victims in Indo-China as soon as a cease-fire was declared. The two international institutions of the Red Cross have called upon Mr. Olof Stroh, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross, to take charge, with assistance from various National Societies, of all operations. These are developing and by the end of March the situation was as follows:

Needs and plans

In response to a personal invitation, Mr. Olof Stroh, Director of the Indo-China Operational Group (IOG), stayed from 17 to 24 February 1973 in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam¹. On his return journey from Hanoi, Mr. Stroh stopped in various countries in Indo-China in order to meet National Red Cross representatives and IOG delegates.

Democratic Republic of Vietnam.—The most important and most urgent of the projects discussed by Mr. Stroh with the authorities and Red Cross of the DRVN concerned the supply of some 10,000 pre-fabricated houses for homeless families. Another pressing request put forward by the North Vietnamese Red Cross was for the supply

¹ *Plate.*

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of ambulances, medicaments and medical equipment. It is estimated that the total cost of these programmes will amount to about 20 million Swiss francs.

Republic of Vietnam.—The National Society has requested food-stuffs for displaced persons not living in refugee camps in South Vietnam. The cost of clothing, blankets and vehicles should be added, bringing the total to 12,280,000 Swiss francs. In addition, special aid projects are also planned: equipment for a centre for paraplegics, to include a 60-bed hospital (Sw. Fr. 2,000,000); fitting out 20 provincial medical centres (Sw. Fr. 6,500,000); development of a convalescent home for amputees (Sw. Fr. 650,000); aid for four orphanages (Sw. Fr. 35,000 for the first six months of 1973). The total cost of these projects is estimated at 21,465,000 Swiss francs.

Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG).—In Hanoi Mr. Stroh met representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam and members of its Red Cross. Aid was solicited from IOG for equipping a 250-bed hospital at an estimated cost of 10 million Swiss francs.

Pathet Lao.—After the cease-fire, Mr. Stroh was in contact with Pathet Lao representatives in Hanoi. Food and medicaments were requested, but no estimates have yet been made.

Laos.—In Vientiane, Mr. Stroh met members of the Lao Red Cross Society's Executive Committee. The IOG delegation in Laos took part in this meeting which made an attempt to evaluate possibilities for the extension of current refugee aid programmes. These include Red Cross assistance to refugee villages and two orthopedic centres, children's vaccination campaigns, vocational rehabilitation programmes for invalids, and the despatch of surgical equipment and medico-social teams to rural areas. Total estimates for the foregoing amount to 7,800,000 Swiss francs.

Khmer Republic.—Assistance to be provided by IOG in the Khmer Republic is estimated at 18,495,000 Swiss francs and includes the despatch of sundry relief supplies and the financing of a medico-social team.



Hanoi : Volunteers of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam distribute hot meals to the inhabitants.

Photos : Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Mrs. Trần Thị Dich, Secretary General of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Mr. Olof Stroh, Co-ordinator of the International Assistance of the Red Cross to Indo-China, discussing in Hanoi with members of a local Red Cross group their relief activities to aid the population.





Distribution organised by the Red Cross of the Republic of Vietnam — with the participation of delegates of the International Assistance of the Red Cross in Indo-China — to the inhabitants of a destroyed village 200 kilometres East of Saigon.

Photo Vaterlaus/IOG

I OG field personnel

There are now 39 delegates in Indo-China helping to co-ordinate the work of International Red Cross Assistance with that of National Societies and other Red Cross organizations. Members of ten National Societies, the League and the ICRC have been sent, and other delegates have been recruited by them. These consist of nationals of the following countries: Canada, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Tunisia.

In the Republic of Vietnam.—Of the 25 delegates in the Republic of Vietnam, eleven are at present assisting members of the National Society in the four regions extending from North to South. The IOG teams travel all over the areas where they are assigned, visiting civilian hospitals, dispensaries, refugee camps, remote villages or others that have been destroyed, and helping the South Vietnamese Red Cross to distribute food, medicaments and other relief supplies.

In the Khmer Republic.—Five IOG delegates aid the Khmer Red Cross in their relief and development programme. This includes tracing services directed by ICRC experts, and medical care provided by a doctor-delegate, who examines daily an average of 40 patients in the Khmer Red Cross dispensaries and 100 to 120 other cases in the camps he visits four times a week.

In Laos.—In addition to six IOG delegates, a Swiss medical team sent by the Swiss Red Cross, consisting of a doctor and two nurses, is now at work in Laos. A second Swiss Red Cross team working under IOG auspices is due to arrive early in April, while the doctor in charge of this new team is already in Luang Prabang. The two doctors and two nurses already on the spot in North Laos are carrying out a vaccination campaign, mainly among the children, in addition to the medical care they are giving to the civilian population. According to estimates made by the Ministry of Health in Laos, approximately 2,000 persons are in need of orthopedic care and equipment.

Distribution of relief

Republic of Vietnam.—From the time the cease-fire began, on 28 January, to 5 March, about 35,000 families representing 190,000 persons received relief supplies distributed by the National Red Cross of the Republic of Vietnam and IOG delegates in the field. The relief supplies, valued at Sw. Fr. 545,850.—, included rice, tinned meat and fish, powdered milk and condensed milk, cooking utensils, mosquito nets, blankets, sleeping mats, clothing material, soap and medicaments.

Laos.—During the first two months of the year, the Lao Red Cross distributed to over 24,000 persons the following supplies: 2,000 blankets, 1,000 mosquito nets, 1,000 sleeping mats, over 4,000 cooking utensils, 425 kg condensed milk and powdered milk, 6 tons salted fish, nearly 4 tons salt and 10 tons rice. Dispensaries, mobile units visiting the “ montagnard ” tribes, and various other private or religious organizations distributed a total of 250,000 tablets of mexasform, nivaquine, multivitamins and aspirin.

Khmer Republic.—In January and February 1973, IOG delegates took part in the distribution of medicaments and other medical supplies, blankets, mosquito nets, milk and salt, for a total value of Sw. Fr. 89,550. Among those who received this aid were 3,700 refugees in Phnom Penh.

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On his return from a visit to Saigon with an international Red Cross team for assistance to Indo-China, Mr. Hubert de Senarclens, ICRC press attaché, gave us the following account :

On 27 January 1973, when the agreement on ending the war was signed, Vietnam emerged from a prolonged nightmare which will leave its mark for many years to come. In a country battered by twenty-five years of ceaseless fighting, peace cannot solve all problems from one day to another.

In December 1972, faced with the prospect of large-scale action in post-war Indo-China, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies set up an "Indo-China Operational Group" responsible for pooling all Red Cross resources. For the first time then, on a vast scale, the Red Cross world was being called upon to undertake a task for which working parties were marshalled in sectors as varied as logistics, personnel, administration and information. Programmes of action were drawn up for assistance and protection, and many National Red Cross Societies sent to Geneva delegates and doctor-delegates who attended two training courses on the countries of Indo-China and the humanitarian problems involved.

On 29 January 1973, the first delegates of International Red Cross Assistance arrived in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam, accompanied by a news-reporting team responsible for collecting material to help the fund-raising which had already been started in Geneva. During the first fortnight they took part in almost daily relief activities which National Red Cross leaders conducted for the population of war-ravaged areas. The teams are now pursuing those activities in the provinces, side by side with regional Red Cross Committees. They are in Da Nang for the entire area south of the 17th parallel; at Qui-Nhon, a coastal town fairly near the Hauts-Plateaux; at Can-Tho, capital of the Mekong Delta, and at Phan-Thiet, not far from Saigon.

The most serious problem in the Republic of Vietnam is that of refugees and displaced persons, who, according to some estimates, exceed a million. Most of the victims are from areas which have become uninhabitable as a result of the recrudescence of acts of war, in the spring of 1972. At that time, hundreds of thousands invaded the towns of Da Nang, Hué, Quang-Ngai, Hoi-An and Quang-Tin. In a matter of days, the civilian and military authorities had to prepare camps and provide food for refugees who for the greater part had lost their all. No one can tell when they will all be resettled in their own villages.

The Red Cross programme of assistance to refugees and displaced persons consists in aiding some 200,000 families by distributing food, medicaments and housing material over a six-month

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period as from the cease-fire ¹. They are already receiving aid in their present quarters, and will continue to receive aid when they return to their home areas.

During the month of February alone, the Red Cross of the Republic of Vietnam, with the co-operation of the delegates of International Red Cross Assistance, helped about 200,000 refugees and displaced persons throughout the country. Relief workers would daily bring them blankets, rice, preserved food, and fish.

In the Republic of Vietnam, we witnessed some moving scenes such as when, during a lull, whole families returned to the ruins of their home and scratched the soil in an attempt to find some article. Many tried to make a temporary shelter between two partly demolished walls or by assembling bamboo. The Red Cross, co-operating with other institutions, will help them until they are able to resume a normal existence.

¹ *Plate.*