

POLAND

At Jadvisine, near Warsaw, the second Regional European Red Cross Youth Conference took place from 2 to 9 September. A special number of *Jestem*, the journal of the Polish Junior Red Cross, was published on this occasion, and gave accounts of various activities carried out by the young people of Poland within their own country and outside it. Two eminent members of the Polish Red Cross introduce this lively and well illustrated issue.

The President of the National Society, Dr. R. Brzozowski, describes the aims and activities of the Red Cross youth movement and what it stands for in Poland.

The Polish Red Cross devotes much attention to work with young people and to the way in which they fulfil the tasks assigned to them on an equal footing with adult members. There is no work specially designated for young people or for adults. Youth, as organized in the Polish Red Cross, is an integral part of the entire movement. Together with the older members, the young people help to solve the growing number of problems pertaining to matters of health education, hygiene, protection of the environment, first-aid instruction. The development of blood donor schemes and the dissemination of knowledge of humanitarian law are two important Red Cross activities in Poland.

The young Red Cross helpers take part in caring for lonely people and in work connected with children. They also care for old people, only a small proportion of whom wish to live in state institutions, most preferring to remain in their own homes, and their wishes are respected. For this reason, the Polish Red Cross encourages all forms of activity which enable old people to live at home: help in housekeeping, shopping and personal services. The old enjoy the company of the young, for whom in turn this work, excellent character training, is humanitarianism in the full meaning of the word. During the past five years the Polish Red Cross has taken into its care almost 300,000 old people, and the work gives the young members much satisfaction.

The Vice-President of the Polish Red Cross, Dr. I. Domanska, in her preface to the special issue of *Jestem*, surveys the activities of the

Junior Red Cross in its 55 years of existence in Poland. She points out that the educational authorities have always appreciated the value of the humanitarian ideals of the Red Cross, and that since 1921 Polish youngsters have taken an active part in the Red Cross school groups. These groups were 400,000 strong in 1939 and their activities covered large parts of the country. During the war, Red Cross work was greatly limited, but thanks to the devotion of young people in particular, assistance could still be given to the victims of war and persecution. Children were taught in clandestine schools where they were also instructed by the Red Cross. Later, as medical orderlies or nurses, they saved many lives, and sometimes sacrificed their own.

During the first post-war years, young people took an active part in Red Cross work, helping to restore their destroyed country. When schools reopened, the school groups of the Red Cross started up again almost everywhere. By the 1960s the Red Cross had some two and a half million members. Every group now conducts health education courses, schools have first-aid stations and secondary schools have first-aid teams. The Red Cross teaches young people how to manage social assistance, how to teach hygiene, and how to protect the environment.

One of the greatest achievements of the Polish Red Cross was the establishment of systematic training for older children in camps specially organized for the purpose. After completing a period of training and proving their real interest in the activities of the Red Cross, the boys and girls receive the title of Junior Red Cross Volunteer Instructors.

Groups of this kind have been set up in Red Cross sections around the country and within the Central Committee. The instructors not only help to train their younger colleagues but also take part in the work of youth commissions and in international conferences. Last year, on their initiative, a symposium was held near Katowice on humanitarian law and its role during military conflicts. This event, reported in the *International Review* in January 1976, was attended by about fifty students, from universities and military academies, who were in charge of groups of the Junior Red Cross.