

TEACHING RED CROSS IN AFRICAN SCHOOLS

In the autumn of 1967, a vast publicity campaign was launched on the African continent to popularize the sign of the Red Cross by means of a book entitled: *The Red Cross and My Country*.

Why this campaign? The mission and activities of the Red Cross are worldwide; at any given moment, the news reporter can focus his camera on a point on the globe where Red Cross presence and action appear to be necessary. The mission of the International Committee is to safeguard the principles of the Red Cross and to work for the advancement of international humanitarian law. The Geneva Conventions, of which it was the creator, epitomize the very ideals of the Red Cross and help spread the spirit of mutual assistance and peace among peoples.

Today, almost every State in the world is bound by this fundamental charter of all humanity. However, for many of them the dissemination of these humanitarian principles had given rise to serious practical problems. For this reason, the ICRC, on the basis of resolution IV, adopted in 1963 at the Centenary Congress, decided to carry out a special operation on the African continent.

It was decided that the best means of teaching the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions would be through schools. School teaching is widespread in the rural African areas and has proved itself to be one of the most stable and effective means of disseminating information. Consequently, the ICRC prepared and printed a handbook specially for primary education, so as to reach not only the city dwellers but also the rural population, which is affected by mutual assistance and relief projects to a much greater extent.

The large number of children and the extraordinary means of communication that schools represent, militated in favour of a school handbook. In fact, schools offer the sole means of surmounting the language barrier as there are 800 dialects spoken on the African continent. The teacher himself could, where necessary, even explain the handbook in the vernacular. It is 126 pages long,

including a large number of illustrations, and exists in both English and French. It covers many aspects of everyday life in such a way as to make the child feel directly involved in what he is reading—wars or natural disasters—so that he becomes familiar with the sign and the principles of the Red Cross and himself tries to help, in the knowledge that he can likewise be helped in time of peace as well as war. The importance of the Geneva Conventions is duly emphasized.

In 1966, as mentioned in the *International Review*¹, the ICRC sent a delegate, Mr. L. Marti, to eleven West African countries. As a result of this mission, nine governments expressed their willingness to have the Red Cross handbook taught in their primary schools. The project was soon planned out and the first phase of the operation began: 127,000 handbooks, in English and French, were distributed free of charge to primary schools in the Ivory Coast, Mali, Dahomey, Togo, Sierra Leone, Ghana, the Gambia, Liberia and Upper Volta.²

Some time later, the International Committee sent a delegate, Mr. J.-M. Laverrière, on mission to Africa to obtain on-the-spot information about the results of the operation and to encourage other governments and National Societies to take part. The mission, which lasted from October to December 1968, resulted in five Ministers of Education or their representatives assenting immediately to take part. They were: Tanzania, Uganda, Niger, Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo. Five other governments have yet to confirm their decision. To meet these new conditions, a second revised edition is being prepared and will probably be available in Africa by next October.

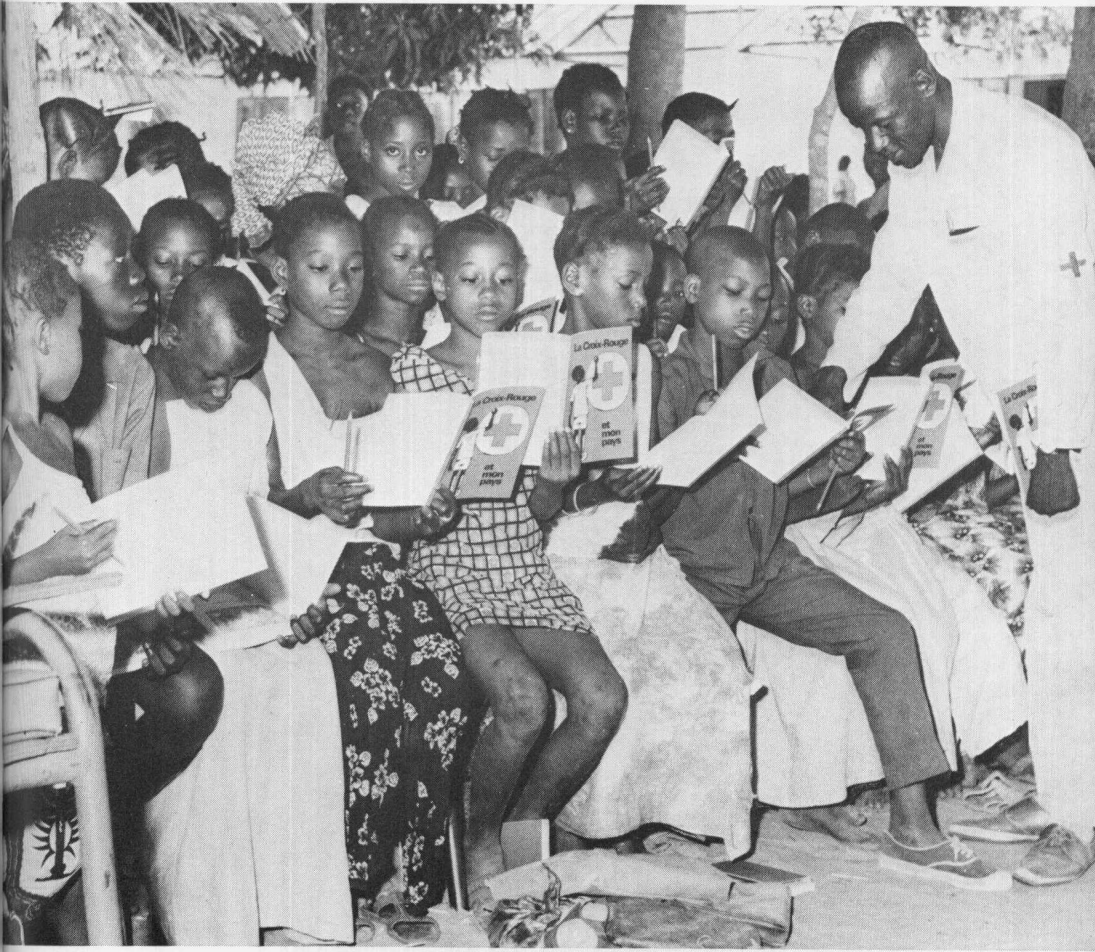
Mr. Laverrière was at the same time able to visit several National Societies of the Red Cross and observe their excellent work—varying greatly from country to country—in helping their neighbours in distress.

¹ See August and October 1966.

² *Plate*.—The handbook *The Red Cross and My Country* is in use in schools in Mali, in Togo, in Ghana.

A little girl in Freetown, Sierra Leone, is interested in the handbook.

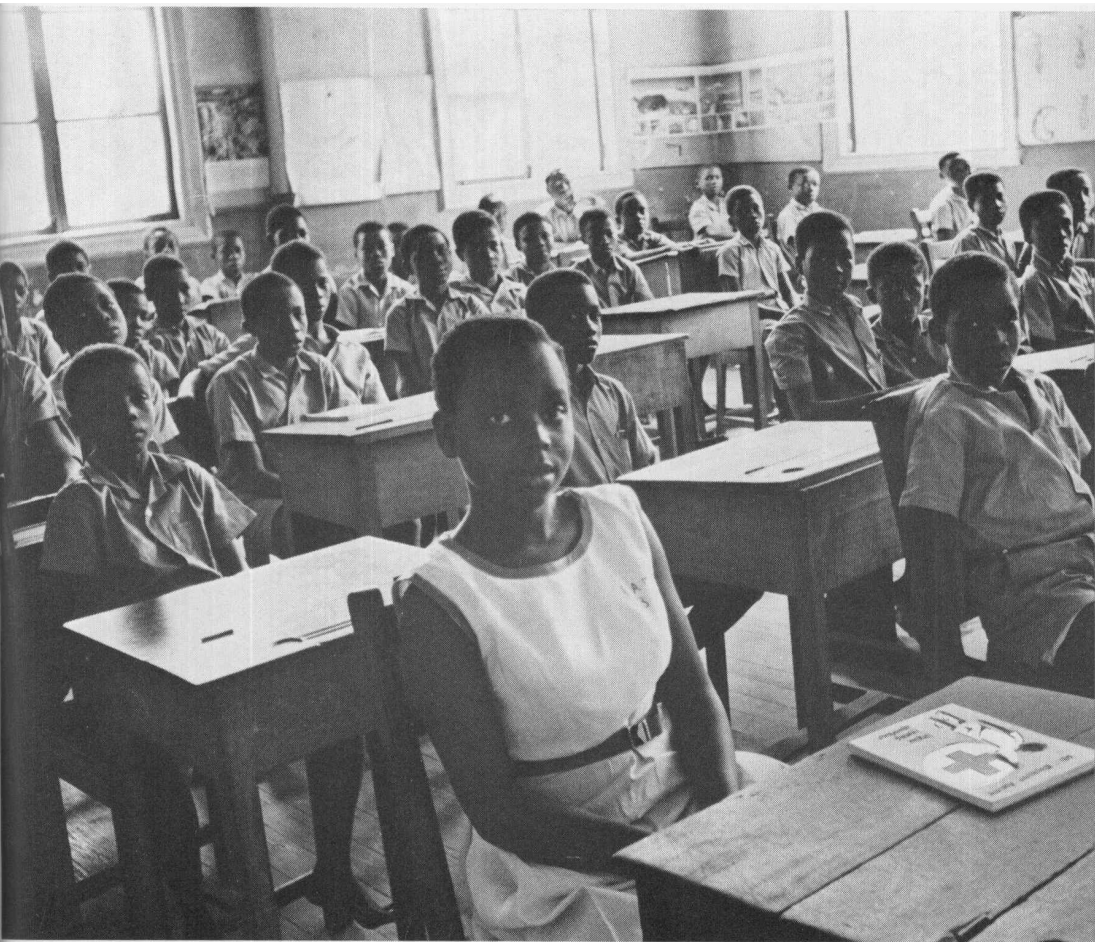
The handbook "The Red Cross and My Country" is in use in schools...



... in Mali



... in Togo



... in Ghana



A little girl in Freetown, Sierra-Leone, is interested in the handbook.

Of course, such a vast publicity campaign involves heavy expenditure. Since it is impossible to send fresh copies every year, thus enabling each pupil to take home his own handbook, for reasons of economy, the ICRC recommends that the books should remain the property of the school. In this way, teaching the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions can be spread over a number of years.

It is to be hoped that hundreds of thousands of African school-children will become familiar with the basic humanitarian principles, without which any fostering of the spirit of mutual assistance and peace among men would be futile. The result of the experiment is, therefore, positive, and plans are already on the drawing board for a similar initiative in the countries of Asia.

RED CRESCENT HELP TO PILGRIMS

The *International Review*, in May 1967, published an article under this heading describing how Red Crescent Societies help the ever increasing number of pilgrims to Mecca. It is interesting to note that the League Secretary-General, Mr. H. Beer, on his return from Saudi Arabia, reported on this National Society activity.

As more than 1,500,000 pilgrims congregate in Mecca this month, the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent is on the alert assisting the Government with health and first-aid work among the faithful massed in a huge tent city. National Red Crescent/Red Cross Societies in countries of origin and along the annual pilgrimage route also contribute to the health education and well-being of the millions who flock to Saudi Arabia by every conceivable means of transport — even on foot. In the Mecca region, Saudi Arabian Red Crescent first-aid posts and mobile units are in action all along the roads leading to the holy places.