

NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Formerly: International Bulletin of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1869

Germany

FEDERAL REPUBLIC

On the occasion of its annual assembly, which was held in May 1963 in Münster, in Westphalia, the Red Cross of the German Federal Republic celebrated the centenary of the Red Cross. The culmination of this celebration was an official ceremony on the morning of May 26, which was attended by almost ten thousand people and which was honoured by the presence of the President of the German Federal Republic, Mr. Heinrich Lübke, of Professor Carlo Schmid, Vice-President of the Bundestag, and several senior officials of government, religious and university circles ¹.

The President of the Red Cross of the German Federal Republic, Mr. H. von Lex, was the first to address the assembly. He greeted the leading personalities present and the crowd of members and well-wishers of the Red Cross who had come to Münster. Then he recalled some of the important events in the history of the Red Cross.

“ It is with satisfaction that we observe that of the first fourteen States which approved the principles of a Red Cross institution as formulated by Henry Dunant, there were no less than seven German States which were at that time independent countries. The spark then generated spread rapidly to all German States.

“ Let there be no mistake about our intentions. When we recall the road covered by the German Red Cross during the past century, it is not as a pretext to sing our own praises and to organize a celebration to our glory. The German Red Cross, in the difficult years following the collapse in 1945, received on behalf of our population many more benefits than it itself had been able to afford to others. It is just this fact which has demonstrated to us the

¹ *Plate.*

extent to which the unshakeable solidity of the Red Cross was able to become ever stronger. Thus were we able to measure all the suffering and misery which that solidity was able to alleviate and all the new hopes to which it gives rise. ”

Mr. H. von Lex concluded by stating that the Red Cross is first and foremost the expression of humanity's desire for peace.

Mr. Heinrich Lubke in his turn recalled some of the great names in the humanitarian epic, such as Florence Nightingale and Albert Schweitzer. He told of Dunant's particular and original contribution and he concluded by affirming that it is the sum of all individual action which is decisive for the future of everybody.

“ . . . The Red Cross, together with all those who co-operate with it, has for a hundred years held first place among the forces which, founded on self-sacrifice, have plunged whole-heartedly into the works inspired by love of one's neighbour and by charity. It is my pleasurable duty to express to them this day the gratitude and appreciation of the German people. It is certainly not difficult to draw up a list of injustices and mistakes; but such complaints would serve no purpose. On the other hand, any man who himself decides to do good and to bring help to those in distress contributes in a positive manner to the improvement of the lot of mankind.

“ On the will and determination of each individual depends the fate of man ; these factors will decide whether humanity will go astray, whether history will sink into the mire at the same time as civilization and culture, or whether the way will be opened to a true peace, to freedom of thought and action and to all that which is necessary for justice to reign.

“ The Red Cross has come to represent for the world the symbol of all efforts undertaken in the name of charity and of the hope which we place in humanity's peaceful future. ”

Professor Carlo Schmid then delivered an impressive speech on the theme “ The Red Cross : a principle of hope for our time ”. Taking the example of Solferino as an illustration, he showed first that a voice speaking from the heart may resound to such an extent that it inspires the world. He explained the genius of Dunant and the prophetic imagination which animated him all his life up to Heiden.

“ Henry Dunant’s action spread far beyond the immediate task which he had envisaged. Realist as he was, and gifted with a lively spirit, he knew that generous impulses wane as soon as they are no longer sustained by a wave of idealism, but that they alone can change the world, provided they are channelled towards positive objectives. That is why he thought that he would achieve nothing in urging governments right away to renounce war. He knew that, for the time being, he would not be able to obtain more than some measure of humanization of the conduct of war. But, in seeking to achieve this objective, men, impelled by that dynamism which is characteristic of all great ideas, must necessarily go forward.

“ In a word, the great realistic movement in favour of peace which has grown in strength in the course of the first half of this century springs from Dunant’s initiative. Free of any exalted sentimental pacifism this initiative incited men to create institutions capable of making recourse to war as a final means of settling international disputes superfluous or at least of making it more difficult for war to break out. Finally, in pursuit of these efforts, reason was translated into political action. If it is possible for States to accept self-imposed restriction on their freedom of action, even in the heat of battle, it should also be possible for nations, by the creation of appropriate institutions and by refraining from acting without any limitation when international conflicts break out, also to renounce having recourse to war and to abstain from invoking its so-called inevitability ”.

The speaker paid tribute to the ICRC, the founder institution which, since 1863, struggles in defence of essential human rights and whose relief activities have been constantly widened.

He then concluded with a statement of confidence in the Red Cross, in the value and ever-present efficacy of its principles.

“ Mankind has travelled a long way since Solferino. There remains very little of the faith which was then placed in moral progress. War has become an even more terrible thing, taking on forms which could not be imagined even twenty years ago.

“ Is this a reason to call in doubt the spirit of Geneva and its effects ? On the contrary ! I believe that to the extent that the struggle for power becomes more frightful, the crusade for man’s

humane behaviour should be encouraged with greater zeal and the white flag with the red cross should be raised even higher. Thus may there come a day when the banner of charity will dominate the flag of war. ”

Greece

The Hellenic Red Cross devoted May 8, 1963 to the official celebration of our movement's Centenary. An impressive ceremony took place at the Odeon of Herod Atticus in front of a large gathering and in the presence of members of the Government and leaders of the National Society, the Swiss Ambassador in Athens and other personalities. Above the tiers of the theatre flew the flags of every district in Greece and this event was the occasion for the assembling of hundreds of nurses dressed in different coloured costumes¹.

Before the official ceremony began, flowers were placed before the portraits of Henry Dunant and Queen Olga, founder of the National Society, and the hymn of the Hellenic Junior Red Cross was sung by children and young people. The Archbishop of Athens, the Metropolitan Christostomos, honorary Vice-President of the Red Cross Society, then officially opened the ceremony.

Speeches were delivered by H.M. the King of Greece, the Minister of Social Welfare and by the President of the Hellenic Red Cross, Mr. Georgacopoulos, who recalled important historical events in the history of the Red Cross.

The ceremony was closed by the blessing of the flag of the Red Cross by the Archbishop of Athens, followed by the singing of the national anthem by those present.

¹ *Plate.*