

Chile

The Review Cruz Roja Chilena (Santiago, No. 43) has produced an article on the organization of the Aid Service of the Chilean Red Cross, of which we now give the main points since it will certainly be of interest to all National Societies.

The Chilean Red Cross always remains prepared. In cases of emergency it undertakes the necessary relief action, in accordance with the standards laid down by the Central Committee and directives drawn up in each case in agreement with the Government.

It was realized in 1960 how extremely vulnerable were the country's communications in earthquakes. In fact all overland routes were practically severed in the southern part of the province of Cautin, all wharfs destroyed at Corral, Puerto Montt, Ancud and Castro, whilst regional airports were rendered unserviceable for a certain period. It was then thought that a chain of emergency depots should be set up, each of which would provide the necessary facilities for the installation, within a few hours of a disaster, of first-aid posts and immediate relief.

From 1960 onwards, the Central Committee has organized and completely equipped twelve emergency depots. Some of these dispose of a single "outfit", others of four and Santiago of twenty. Each of these outfits comprises medical and surgical material, injection kits, medicines, clothing, furniture, rescue equipment, blankets and water-purifying instruments. None of these items can be used without authorization from the Central Committee and they are stored and maintained by the Red Cross branch to which they have been allotted.

There is also a relief warehouse at Santiago for whose extension a sum is allocated each year. The object is to provide for the requirements of the emergency depots which should be organized in cases of national disasters to enable relief distributions to be started, if possible, a few hours after a calamity. This warehouse disposes of a large reserve of clothing, warm under-clothes, household and toilet articles for the needs of eventual homeless. Furthermore, the Chilean Red Cross proposes to establish further warehouses in various localities in due course.

The earthquake which affected the central provinces in 1965 demonstrated the effectiveness of the humanitarian action. On the third day following the disaster, voluntary teams from the Santiago, Valparaiso and Viña del Mar branches made inquiries on the spot, in order to discover those families which had suffered most and to what extent, as regards food, personal belongings etc.. In thirty-six towns and villages, 15,000 inquiries were made, the results of which were studied with care and grouped in three categories of urgency, according to the damage incurred. Naturally, the families most affected were the first to be aided on the basis of inquiry cards drawn up for each family, giving their needs of clothing, warm under-clothes and household articles. These results also served for the preparation of parcels, cases and packages, all appropriately labelled.

On the sixth day, teams of Red Cross volunteers began to distribute relief. They went to the various sites in lorries placed at their disposal by the army. No less than thirty-six mobile relief distribution posts were then functioning in many places, distributions being made according to the following criteria :

(a) Relief is handed over direct to families according to needs as shown by prior inquiries.

(b) In deciding what should be given to each family, it should be remembered that aid must be adequate, so that prepared parcels should, if possible, contain relief in the form of household articles, clothing, warm under-clothing, etc. Clothing, for example, will be prepared as individual equipment, consisting of one blanket, a suit or a pair of trousers and a coat and under-clothes (the same quantity for adults as for children of various ages). To this will be added household articles, plates, cups, pots, etc., which will constitute the " family parcel ".

Relief so far distributed, with the exception of 1000 blankets from the USSR and 250 from Uruguay, was provided from the reserve stocks which the Chilean Red Cross had collected and deposited in its central warehouse. Some figures can be quoted showing the importance of relief already distributed :

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

9,116	blankets
7,632	clothing for men
9,048	„ „ women
9,696	„ „ boys
7,912	„ „ girls
5,526	„ „ infants
31,784	household articles.

At both the inquiries and the distributions, the members of the Red Cross branches carried out various tasks with great devotion. Distributions to homeless families took place without those incidents which were numerous in 1960 when no control was imposed. The system put into practice by the Red Cross showed itself to be effective and distributions, which were always made at the appropriate moment, made it certain that relief in fact went to the proper beneficiaries.

In addition to the inquiries and distributions which it has undertaken, the Red Cross, in 1965, supplied personnel at various points most affected by the earthquake. These volunteers dealt with the vaccination of the homeless and, in Santiago, with the organization and administration of the depots established by the Government. In this case, relief in store is distributed by the State institutions, Red Cross personnel being responsible only for reception, classification and organization of relief supplies.

In 1960, an earthquake followed by a ferocious tidal-wave caused the death of 800,000 people, but no further earthquake took place in Chile until March 28, 1965. However, it little matters how long a period elapses between two disasters; the Red Cross is at all times prepared. We know that it brings aid without distinction of race, nationality, political beliefs, social class or religion.
