

SEMINAR FOR ASIAN JOURNALISTS

(Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia, 14-15 November 1990)

A seminar entitled "Focus on the media and the ICRC" was held in Kuala Lumpur on 14 and 15 November for 19 journalists from seven Asian countries (India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam). The seminar was also attended by a number of ICRC representatives, including the heads of the Communication Department and the Press Division in Geneva, the Deputy Delegate General for Asia, the regional delegates based in Jakarta and Hong Kong and the head of the ICRC delegation in the Philippines.

The meeting was organized by the ICRC Communication Department, in co-operation with the Malaysian Red Crescent Society. Its purpose was to inform the participants about the ICRC and its goals and above all to strengthen ties with journalists from countries where the ICRC is working, with a view to creating a support network within the Asian media.

The two-day seminar started with a general presentation on the ICRC and international humanitarian law and then dealt with topics of direct relevance to journalists, such as the ICRC's information policy and how it is affected by the institution's rule of discretion, which the media often fail to understand; the ICRC's relations with the local press versus the international media; how information on humanitarian activities is sometimes used for political purposes; and the relationship between humanitarian law and human rights.

Discussions also centred on the protection of journalists on dangerous missions — a topic of particular relevance in countries such as the Philippines — and what the ICRC can do in this connection.

Following a presentation by the Malaysian Red Crescent on its activities in behalf of Vietnamese boat people, there was an extensive debate on this problem of major concern to all the countries in the region.

The seminar was a resounding success, thanks to the high standard of the attendance and the quality and intensity of the discussions. All the participants expressed the wish to support the ICRC's efforts in their respective fields of activity at the national level and to maintain the links established with the institution.

This seminar was the last of a series held since 1986 in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and the Middle East. The meetings were financed by special funds made available to the ICRC Communication Department by the Aga Khan Foundation for a training programme involving both ICRC headquarters staff and the media in countries where the ICRC is working.