

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

DISSEMINATION OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

GHANA

The Ghana Red Cross in August last held a seminar on the Geneva Conventions in Accra. We wish to draw attention to that meeting under the patronage of the Minister for Foreign Affairs because of its interest. It lasted a full day and was attended by representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Defence, Health and Education, and from the Police and Prisons Services. Papers were delivered by outstanding Ghanaian personalities such as Judge Crabbe—who took part in the first two sessions of the Diplomatic Conference in Geneva—Professor de Graft Johnson, of Logon University, Judge Ollenu, President of the National Society, a doctor in the armed forces of Ghana, and a representative of the League of Red Cross Societies who spoke on the role of National Societies in developing countries. Representatives of all local Red Cross sections were also present.

Mr. M. Schroeder, regional delegate of the ICRC, gave a talk on Red Cross action throughout the world. This was followed by a discussion. Lectures by other speakers dealt mainly with the rights of man, the laws of war and the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

In his closing address, the President of the National Society referred to the role of the Red Cross in both war and peace and to the necessity of making the Geneva Conventions widely known. We quote some parts of his paper:

“The Ghana Red Cross Society has organized this Seminar in order to acquaint as many people as possible with the laws governing conditions of war, and to give an insight, as it were, into the activities of the Red Cross, that is, what they do in times of war and of other emergencies and disaster . . . Need we wait to become engulfed by these clouds of ill and evil before acquainting ourselves with the rights, no less than the duties, which devolve upon us in times of war, during moments of crisis, and when emergency strikes?

“The Red Cross is a Society the traditions of which require us to be ever ready at all times to face emergency not with resignation or despair but with a determination of hope to serve. Not to ponder over the possibilities of what might have been, but to go into action and alleviate the sufferings that cry aloud for succour. The Red Cross is a movement poised for action. It translates ideals into action. Its philosophy is the rationalization of actions and the improvement of the well-being of the human race, physically, morally and spiritually.

“The effectiveness and relevance of the Red Cross is demonstrated by the remarkable results it has achieved. The dislocations and sufferings caused by war do not cease with the cessation of hostilities. Starvation and distress follow in the wake of the horrors of war. And so the Red Cross concerns itself with the relief of starvation and the alleviation of distress by distributing food, clothing, and medical necessities.

“The most important contribution of the Red Cross from a long range point of view is its work relating to the extension and improvement of international humanitarian law. From the Geneva Conventions of 1863 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Red Cross had shown its activities in serving the needs of mankind where Governments would be outwitted by political considerations and therefore unable to act properly. . .

“The Red Cross both at the international and national levels is bound to the observance of strict neutrality. It is engaged in a humanitarian task. In this wise, the only criteria are need and urgency—no distinction of race, religion, nationality or political opinion affects it. It exists for the benefit of all.”

NIGERIA

A regional delegate of the ICRC for West and Central Africa visited the Federal Republic of Nigeria a few months ago. In the course of his mission, organized in close co-operation with the Nigerian Red Cross, he met professors at the Universities of Lagos, Ife, Ibadan and Enugu. His discussions with them dealt with the teaching and current development of international humanitarian law and with research into ground common to customary law in Africa and the Geneva Conventions. He conferred also with the President of the Central Committee of the Nigerian Red Cross.

POLAND

The Polish Red Cross organized a seminar on the diffusion of the Geneva Conventions at Wisla, near Katowice, during October. About fifty students from universities and military academies, holding positions of leadership in the Polish Junior Red Cross, took part in the meeting.

Several directors of the National Red Cross participated, as did a delegate of the ICRC and a representative of the German Red Cross of the German Democratic Republic.

In her opening address, Mrs. I. Domanska, vice-president of the Polish Red Cross and chairman of the commission on humanitarian law, stressed the importance of educating young people in a spirit of humanity and solidarity. If humanitarian principles were to be respected, she said, youth must first be taught to act as responsible individuals in their daily lives, with respect for one another and in awareness of the ideals which inspire Red Cross action.

Colonel T. Mallik, head of the legal branch of the Polish army, outlined the basic principles of the Geneva Conventions, following this with a summary of the first two sessions of the Diplomatic Conference. He devoted particular attention to the special role of the ICRC, to its right of initiative and its protective functions.

A lively discussion followed, dealing largely with the possible contribution of international humanitarian law to educating man in a spirit of peace and solidarity and the need to spread knowledge of the Conventions in order to obtain better respect for them.

The seminar continued with a study of methods for disseminating the principles of humanitarian law. In this connection, the deputy director of the Junior Red Cross summarized the initiatives already taken in this field by the Polish Red Cross and described various methods which could be used with the different age groups for whom the teaching is intended.

Miss F. Perret, delegate of the ICRC, spoke of the variety of activities undertaken by the ICRC to support the diffusion efforts of Governments and National Societies. She also reminded participants of the resolutions adopted on the subject by International Conferences of the Red Cross, after which she presented material produced by the ICRC, in particular the school textbook, the "Soldier's Manual", the model course, films, slides and a variety of publications.

Following a report by the representative of the German Red Cross of the German Democratic Republic on the activities of that society in diffusing Red Cross principles, especially through the publication of

pamphlets, a general discussion followed, leading to general agreement on the following points:

The Red Cross must participate in the education of youth. One of its main responsibilities is to inculcate fundamental humanitarian principles in all children. It is in this general context of humanitarian education that the teaching of the Geneva Conventions should be carried out, bearing in mind that these constitute only one aspect of the Red Cross ideal. The overall purpose of the teaching should be to induce "conditioned humanitarian reflexes" in young people, and instruction in the specific principles of the Geneva Conventions should come later, in secondary school and university courses.

The participants in the seminar considered that the teaching of the Conventions should be adapted to the various sectors of the population but that a complete view of the conventions as a whole should always be provided. As for teaching procedures, they recommended the use of the most modern and attractive educational material. They proposed to produce their own television broadcasts, with animated cartoons, etc., and agreed to contact the Ministry of Education to make sure that several hours of teaching be devoted to Red Cross principles every year, in all Polish schools and at every level.

The interest shown by Polish young people in the problems of teaching the principles of international humanitarian law is especially important, as indicated by the fact that the seminar itself took place on the initiative of Junior Red Cross volunteer instructors.