

The Belgian Red Cross and dissemination of international humanitarian law

Flemish-speaking Community

On 7 and 8 December 1979, the Flemish-speaking branch of the Belgian Red Cross held at Ostend its first colloquium on the dissemination of international humanitarian law. The sixty persons who took part, all of whom had studied law, will become "disseminators" of international humanitarian law in the thirty regions of Belgian Flanders (two for each region).

In the morning, Polish and Belgian university lecturers spoke on the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, international humanitarian law and human rights. The representative of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany gave an account of what was being done in his country in the field of dissemination and the ICRC delegate spoke on the policy adopted on dissemination and the practical results achieved.

In the afternoon, the participants broke up into four working groups to discuss various subjects, such as the recruitment and training of voluntary workers in dissemination, and ways and means possible in Flanders to bring knowledge of international humanitarian law to the armed forces, universities, schools, medical corps, Red Cross volunteers and the general public.

The purpose of this colloquium was to give a better grasp of international humanitarian law to those persons who had offered to deliver in 1980 at least two lectures on the subject in their own region. It will be interesting to examine in a year's time to what extent this laudable effort will have contributed to the spread of knowledge of international humanitarian law.

French-speaking community

On 1 and 2 March 1980, in Liège, the First Red Cross Congress of the French-speaking community, presided by H. R. H. Prince Albert of

Liège, was held on the theme "The Red Cross from 1980 to 2000 A.D."

The general aim was to examine what the Red Cross would be like in the next twenty years and to seek how and with what means it would be possible to meet the new needs that would arise in a constantly changing society.

During those two days, about one thousand participants separated into ten different working groups, or "carrefours", each one considering one particular Red Cross activity (first aid, blood donors, junior Red Cross, dissemination of international humanitarian law, etc.).

In the field of dissemination of international humanitarian law, of particular concern to the ICRC, the subject dealt with by one of the "carrefours" was: "For a better knowledge and dissemination of international humanitarian law and co-operation in international action". This group was chaired by Professor Eric David, who spoke on breaches of international humanitarian law; other speakers were Mr. R. Gaillard-Moret, the ICRC representative, Mrs. Gastaut, director of the United Nations Office in Brussels, and Mr. Roger Leclère, a former head of one of the divisions of the Belgian Red Cross.

It was interesting to find that the concrete proposals included in the conclusions adopted by this group were made in the same spirit as that of the conclusions of the Warsaw seminar (March 1977). The proposals put forward included: the creation of a dissemination and documentation service within the French-speaking general directorate of the Belgian Red Cross, the organization of a dissemination programme, and the introduction of notions of international humanitarian law into various Red Cross activities.

The very encouraging results obtained at the Congress were due to the constructive and thoroughly painstaking efforts of many of the participants. The ICRC was gratified to see that a National Society was taking the trouble of integrating its international humanitarian law dissemination programme into its other activities, in keeping with one of the wishes expressed at the Warsaw seminar.

It should be mentioned, furthermore, that *at the national level* the Belgian Red Cross Documentation Service helped eighty-eight students to prepare theses, papers and graduate studies, the majority on subjects connected with international humanitarian law.¹

¹ Communicated by the Belgian Red Cross.