

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

21st WORLD RED CROSS DAY

Every year, on May 8, National Societies celebrate the anniversary of Henry Dunant's birth. They avail themselves of the opportunity to make known in their countries, as widely as possible, and in a manner as vivid as it is varied, the activities of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and the Red Lion and Sun. The aim of the League of Red Cross Societies in choosing *Red Cross is Everybody's Concern*¹ as the theme for the celebration, was to stress a twofold reality:

The many and varied activities of the Red Cross may be of interest to each one of us, whoever and wherever we may be, whether young or old, at some moment in our lives. Everyone may one day need the Red Cross.

But the Red Cross also has an imperious need of ever-increasing voluntary support, which the public can give it by offering its time, its ability, its blood and its money. On the occasion of World Red Cross Day 1968 the intention is to emphasize these two important and complementary aspects, which have become indissolubly linked. Henry Dunant's own comment on the movement he founded was: "It is work by all for all: it must appeal to every human being". It is an invitation to all, and a constant, insistent reminder which explains the movement's development, to which the following figures give eloquent testimony:

In 1950, there were 67 National Societies, with a total membership of 95 million persons; in 1968 there are 109 with more than 210 million members, i.e. an increase of more than 50 % in the number of National Societies whose total combined membership has more than doubled.

¹ Complete documentation on World Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Day is available from the League Information Service in Geneva.

The theme chosen this year makes it possible to stress the universality of the movement in the widest sense of the term. It involves the extension of the Red Cross to all parts of the world and also its amazing diversity of action through which it can be of service to each and everyone both in time of peace and war, and not only in periods of emergency. This was the message stressed by the Chairman of the Board of Governors and the Secretary-General of the League:

Mr. José Barroso. — *We are confronted by a paradoxical world situation: while each day ever faster modern transport and more effective electronic communications help to bring men closer together, at the same time the words "humanitarian ideals" seem to be losing their meaning. Faced with the spectacle of so much indifference among men, we wonder whether it is still possible to say: "The Red Cross is everybody's concern".*

For us in Red Cross it appears inconceivable that in an age of such rapid material progress anyone can remain indifferent to this noble movement and deaf to the appeal made to the best in human nature.

This appeal was made for the first time by Henry Dunant, when, faced by the anguish and desolation left by the war he had just witnessed, he felt the depth of the tragedy and dimly saw the possibility of finding a remedy.

On World Red Cross Day, we evoke our founder's initiative. In a world which seems to be blindly hurtling towards self-destruction his work becomes more necessary than ever. It might almost be said that the negative forces are conspiring to challenge our movement.

We should not confine our efforts to playing a charitable role. We must repeat the dramatic appeal which lies at the origin of the Red Cross, to move the hearts of those so far indifferent and encourage them to join in our theme "The Red Cross is everybody's concern". We must fight to make it understood that the aims of the Red Cross are worthy of the dedication of all men of goodwill—the right to live in peace, the right to health and dignity of the individual no matter what his race, political convictions or creed.

World Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Day gives us an appropriate opportunity to reveal to each man the full significance of the slogan "The Red Cross is everybody's concern". Its best

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and most positive meaning, in the spirit of Henry Dunant, is not ask "What can the Red Cross do for me in case of need?" but rather—and this is more worthy of our human race—"What can I do to keep alive the ideal of the Red Cross?"

Mr. Henrik Beer. — *That Red Cross is everybody's concern may seem to some to be a pretty big statement. Of course, they may know that Red Cross concerns the injured, the sick, the homeless, the hungry, the old, the lonely . . . Then, it may concern them more directly, once a year, when a fund-raiser comes to their door, or stops them in the street.*

But how many have stopped to think, or are even aware, that Red Cross is really their direct concern, whether they be sick or well, hungry or well-fed, old and lonely or young and "in with the group". Do they know that this world-wide movement unites the efforts of hundreds of millions of men, women, and young people who are giving of themselves to find ways of rooting out the causes of the suffering which no one, in this age of rapid communications, can ignore? Do they know that Red Cross, through its health education programmes for young and old alike, is making a significant contribution to the fight against disease? Do they know that National Societies in the world's newest nations, where development problems are most difficult, are working side by side with governments to improve nutrition and health standards? Or that Red Cross in many ways is attacking the causes of accidents, and is helping draw up plans to reduce the hazards of natural disasters?

Do they know that by working to spread its principles, the Red Cross is in the forefront of efforts to achieve lasting peace?

The World Day of the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Lion and Sun offers an ideal opportunity for all to be convinced at heart, that "The Red Cross is everybody's concern."

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Suffering is an appeal to everybody: the 1968 slogan stands for increasing recourse to voluntary workers. What are the jobs open to Red Cross volunteers? Very roughly they can be split up into two broad categories: helping to relieve suffering; and helping to prevent suffering. In Henry Dunant's time, the accent was on the first; today, more and more, Red Cross is looking for ways to

achieve the second. Here, without giving a full catalogue, are some examples:

Helping to relieve suffering: All the most traditional Red Cross services fall into this category: caring for the sick (nursing auxiliaries, home nursing, hospital service to relieve pressure on professional personnel); first-aid (trained volunteers ready to care for the injured in accidents, disasters, at sports events, in time of conflict); caring for and serving the aged and the handicapped (helping to relieve their physical and *mental* sufferings); disaster relief (sheltering, clothing, feeding and comforting those who have lost all in a catastrophe); giving blood and helping to recruit blood donors.

Helping to prevent suffering: Many jobs are open to all types of volunteers, both trained and untrained, old and young, in this most important field. They include participating in a wide variety of campaigns for better health standards and the prevention of accidents in the home, on the roads, in factories, on the beaches and sports grounds, in the schools. Red Cross Volunteers help in mass vaccination campaigns to prevent epidemics such as smallpox; they go out into their towns and villages to clean up slums and teach better hygiene to the population.

The approach to voluntary service varies widely from country to country however.

In some countries, the very idea of voluntary service is a relatively new one, and the Red Cross is faced with overcoming centuries-old prejudices to educate the public in the idea of giving time to help people they do not know.

In many of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the demand for Red Cross services in its rôle as an auxiliary to public health authorities often exceeds the available supply of volunteers with the necessary skills and aptitudes. Here the need to recruit and train volunteers is one of the first concerns of National Societies. Hence much of the technical assistance contributed by National Societies last year to the League of Red Cross Societies "Red Cross Development Programme" went towards this training.

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World Red Cross Day in 1968, depending on various events which are planned, such as processions, broadcasts by radio and television, articles in the press, conferences, relief supplies collection and distribution, will demonstrate the activity and ubiquity throughout the world today of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and the Red Lion and Sun.

IN LATIN AMERICA

Three League of Red Cross Societies Seminars

We have already on several occasions brought to the attention of our readers the activities, problems and achievements of the Red Cross in Latin America.¹ In this part of the world the Red Cross is a living reality and every day it seeks the better to fulfil its rôle as an auxiliary to the public authorities and to help those in need, whatever their religion, race or nationality. To achieve this, the National Societies, which already hold regular inter-American Red Cross Conferences, have been encouraged by the League of Red Cross Societies to come together for the purpose of exchanging ideas, comparing experiences and as far as possible standardizing working methods.

To facilitate meetings, the continent has been divided into four sectors: North and Central America; Northern South America; Southern South America; Caribbean. For the first three regions, the League convened and sponsored three seminars which were recently held, the first in Guatemala, the second in Caracas and the third in Buenos Aires. Each time the Red Cross in the host country extended a warm welcome to each guest.²

¹ e.g. *International Review*, April 1965.

² The author of this article represented the League of Red Cross Societies at these three seminars. (Ed.)