

BRINGING THE RED CROSS TO AFRICA

It is gratifying that of the 126 States in the world, 111 National Red Cross Societies have so far been constituted. This is cause for satisfaction ; but how great is the effort required of the ICRC and the League to disseminate ever more widely the principles of the Red Cross and the spirit which underlies them !

In 1960, the so-called " Independence Year ", there were only nine National Societies in Africa. Today twenty-eight Societies have been or are about to be recognized by the ICRC. On no other continent has growth been so rapid or enthusiasm so keen. It must however be admitted that these Societies have only very limited resources and that their standing, both with the government and the population itself, deserves to be strengthened.

The ICRC has recognized these Societies ; although it is not responsible for their development, it is by no means indifferent and concerns itself very particularly with spreading knowledge of the humanitarian rules not only among those who serve the Red Cross but also among those who may perhaps one day benefit from Red Cross action. On several occasions its delegates have observed that it would have been easier to give assistance if those in need had had previous knowledge of the mission of the International Committee and of the reasons which induced it, in time of conflict, to take part in relief operations even in the most isolated areas.

Consequently, one of our institution's major preoccupations is to make known the emblem, the mission and name of the ICRC, and also the main provisions of the Geneva Conventions at least in elementary form.

For this reason it was decided to edit a handbook intended for primary school children in Africa. It exists already in draft form and its final version should be off the press by the beginning of 1967.

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

This project raises several questions : Why begin with Africa ? Why is the handbook intended only for primary schools ? Who is financing the operation ?

— Africa first,

because, as we said earlier, many States on that continent are young and the National Societies, whose rôle and importance are sometimes misunderstood, are lacking in resources. Introduction of courses on the Red Cross into school programmes would therefore be a particularly valuable means of propagation.

— Primary schools

because the aim is not only to reach the urban, but also the rural populations, the more frequent beneficiaries of mutual assistance and relief programmes. Schooling is widespread in rural Africa and is one of the most reliable and effective channels of communication.

— Finance

will depend on the generosity of donors who might be recruited among governmental and specialized international organizations concerned with cultural problems and education, in addition to private donors with a special interest in the “ preventive ” action of the Red Cross.

Following a recent mission carried out by an ICRC delegate in West Africa ¹ eleven governments have so far given the ICRC their agreement of principle to the introduction of courses based on the handbook as from autumn 1967.² The first practical phase of the operation has thus started and it is to be hoped that in a few years hundreds of thousands of school children will be familiar with the elementary principles which, transcending racial or political differences, contribute to the spread of the spirit of mutual assistance and peace among the nations.

¹ See *International Review*, August 1966.

² i.e. : Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Mali, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey.