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**SUPPLEMENT**

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# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## THE PRESIDENCY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

GENEVA, February 15, 1955.

### *406th Circular*

*to the Central Committees of National Red Cross  
(Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies.*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Monsieur Paul Ruegger has informed the International Committee of the Red Cross of his wish to be relieved, within the next few months, of the duties he has assumed for nearly seven years as President of the Committee.

The International Committee responding to this wish has asked him however to continue in function until autumn. The Committee, furthermore, has requested President Ruegger to

undertake, subsequently, important missions on its behalf. M. Ruegger will thus remain available to the Committee; he will, in future, devote himself, more particularly, to the legal problems connected with the development of the Geneva Conventions.

As successor to M. Ruegger the International Committee has unanimously elected as President M. Leopold Boissier, Member of the Committee since 1946. M. Leopold Boissier, who is the son of M. Edmond Boissier, former Member and Vice-President of the International Committee, has already rendered eminent service to the Red Cross movement. For several years he has presided over the Legal Commission of the International Committee; he was Vice-President of the International Committee from 1950 to 1953, and has once more assumed that function.

*The new President will take up his office on September 1, 1955.*

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M. Leopold Boissier, born in Geneva on July 16, 1893, pursued his university studies in Geneva and Zurich, and obtained the degree of Doctor of Laws. He was a member of the Swiss Government services from 1917 to 1920 and occupied diplomatic posts in Berne, Rome and London. In 1933 he became Secretary-General of the Interparliamentary Union, a post from which he resigned in 1953.

He presided over the Swiss Association for the League of Nations, the Swiss Council of Peace Associations, and the Federation of semi-official or private agencies which had their headquarters in Geneva. After being entrusted by Geneva University with instruction in comparative constitutional law, he was awarded a professorship in 1943.

M. Boissier edited the "Annuaire Interparlementaire" and "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information" until 1953. He is also the author of various publications, in particular,

“ L'avènement de la démocratie en Suisse ”, 1918; “ Le contrôle de la politique étrangère ”, 1924, “ Regards vers la paix ”, 1942; “ Nouveaux regards vers la paix ”, 1943; and, from 1933, “ L'Année politique ”.

M. Boissier is a corresponding member of the Institut de France, the International Institute of Public Law and other intellectual associations. He is also a member of the Standing Arbitration Commission for questions concerning Norway and Switzerland.

The International Committee has placed at its head a man who will, it knows, be worthy of the task, and who will devote all his ability, his thoughts and his energy to maintaining the Red Cross ideal at its highest level.

In carrying on its work the International Committee continues to rely upon the support which has been so loyally granted to it in the past by the National Societies.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS

## News Items

*The reuniting of adult "Volksdeutsche" (German-speaking ethnical minorities) resident in Jugoslavia, either alone or accompanied by their children, with their families, was continued. The action was started in 1952, following an agreement concluded through the intermediary of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In January 1955, 850 persons belonging to these ethnical minorities left for Germany, or will shortly be leaving with permits issued during the month.*

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*The resumption of collective convoys between Poland and Germany, in connection with the reuniting of families, has enabled 241 persons of German origin to proceed to West Germany during the month of January, 1955. It will be recalled that this action for the reuniting of families had been pursued until the International Committee's decision to discontinue it, and it was resumed later as a result of the representations made by the German Red Cross Society to the Polish Red Cross Society.*

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*In the course of 1954, the value of relief supplies consisting of foodstuffs, clothing, tonics and medicaments distributed to the Greek civilian population by the ICRC Delegation in Athens amounted to Sw.Fr. 319,177. The beneficiaries of this assistance were refugees, victims of earthquakes, children in poor health and persons interned or under detention. The above figure includes the cost of a campaign for the detection of tuberculosis among the*

*civilian population and internees, as well as the expenditure incurred for supplying artificial limbs to amputees.*

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*At the Central Prisoners of War Agency—whose current activities call for the sending out of 4,000 letters per month, and are essentially concerned with the 1939-45 conflict and its effects upon members of the population who have been deported, separated from their families or who have emigrated—a definite increase was observed in the number of requests concerning cases dealt with during the First World War.*

*The majority of these cases concern Germans who were resident until 1939, in territories which have now become Russian or Polish, inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine who are at present French citizens, but fought in the German forces from 1914 to 1918, a few French nationals and some British.*

*These former prisoners of the First World War, or their relatives, apply to the Agency for certificates of captivity, and attestations concerning diseases contracted in camps, which have become incurable or have caused death. The certificates issued enable the persons concerned—widows and orphans—to still benefit by pensions.*

*In December 1954 and January 1955 the Agency received about forty requests of this nature, to which it was able to give satisfactory replies.*

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*The sending of parcels to war victims took place on a particularly large scale in 1954. The ICRC services despatched 2,000 parcels of foodstuffs and 900 winter parcels containing clothing. Each parcel also included toilet requisites. The beneficiaries of the action were of some twenty different nationalities.*

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*The International Committee's pharmaceutical relief action was continued throughout the whole of last year. The number of*

recipients reached 9,680 and parcels were sent to 18 countries. Statistics for January show that 568 cases were dealt with.

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*The Disablement Section continued its collective and individual relief work. At Christmas a donation received, following a broadcast organised by the Short Wave Service of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, enabled it to send parcels of foodstuffs and tonics to about thirty young Austrian war-disabled in Vienna. In response to a request received from the Guatemalan Red Cross Society on behalf of the victims of recent disturbances, it supplied that Society with 50 temporary eyes and 50 plastic artificial eyes.*

*The International Committee also asked its Lebanon delegate to purchase warm underclothing for refugees in Mieh-Mieh suffering from tuberculosis.*

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## THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL CIRCLES AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

*Action in the humanitarian field today, unlike that of the past, requires that increased attention must be paid to social backgrounds.*

*When making a charitable gesture, one no longer considers only the individual, but also the group to which he belongs. Medical relief, for instance, can only be undertaken with effective results if one can foresee the reactions to which it may give rise among those who are to be the beneficiaries. One must therefore be aware of the socio-cultural conditions in which they live and which determine, to a great extent, their ways of thinking, their actions and their understanding of events.*

*This also means that relief organisations and their delegates must not only have a profound knowledge of the circles where their action will take place, but a sincere respect for their culture and traditions. One must be prepared to accept other points of view than those of the West, and to appreciate at their true value the treasures and the fundamental doctrines of the civilisations which will be met with. The Red Cross is also concerned with these problems and the Revue internationale has published various articles with the intention of showing that the basic idea of helping one's fellow men is an integral part of a universal trend of thought and action, of which the expression is to be found in all great civilisations.*

*In these great civilisations we find numerous examples of the existence of a sentiment of mutual aid at one epoch or another. This is also true of certain African civilisations, less influenced by the outside world. There is no doubt, however, that whereas civilisations tend to be drawn closer to one another, by the fact that they find they have points of resemblance, certain conflicts may be occasioned by the ever-increasing penetration of " industrial civilisation " as it is called today ; the introduction of this form of civilisation leads to new mental attitudes and behaviour and frequently upsets traditional human relationships.*

*Concerned by the serious problems of a psychological order which have arisen in connection with missions sent to countries where industry has not reached a high stage of development, a few persons, of whom the majority belong to the international organisations grouped in Geneva, held a meeting, of a strictly private nature, to examine the causes of certain unsuccessful results and to try to find a remedy. They reached the conclusion that the problem should be viewed from three different angles, which we may express in the form of questions, as follows :*

- (a) When providing technical assistance, can and should one agree to an existing form of civilisation being, to a certain extent, destroyed ? Would this be likely to cause an impoverishment of man's heritage : can one dissociate technical progress from the ideology from which it emerged ?*
- (b) Can and should certain reforms be imposed before the genuine need for them has been felt by those among whom we wish to introduce them ?*
- (c) What precautions should be taken by the expert, as well as those by whom he is sent and those who receive him, in order that the mission may be as successful as possible from every point of view ?*

*M. R. Olgiati, Member of the International Committee of the Red Cross, submitted and commented upon the conclusions of this group, at a recent conference. His survey was entitled " The international social worker and the East-West problem ". This*

*publication, it will be observed, is not only a contribution towards the study of conditions of current interest, which are being viewed everywhere with growing attention, but is also a reminder of the interest taken by the Red Cross in questions relating to the efficacy of humanitarian action in the contemporary world. (J.-G. L.).*

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We are aware that the origin of what we today call "social work" is to be found—we are only referring here to the Western world—in Christianity, and in ideas—such as humanism, human rights and certain rational notions of the day—which in the last analysis spring from it. From its very origin the Christian Church encouraged charity towards one's fellowman and founded charitable institutions; it witnessed the founding of orders (today we should call them organisations) of which the principal object was, and still is, to relieve human suffering. We will cite, as one example only, the Order of the Fratelli Camillini which, since 1586, has been engaged in the care of the sick.

Although the efforts of these charitable bodies were in every case devoted to suffering close at hand, their sphere of action was only limited by the means at their disposal and the possibilities open to them, and the ideal at which they aimed was to help mankind as a whole. Though they were not, and could not be, "international", they were essentially universal, since they made no distinction of any kind. It was only later, when charitable effort inspired by divine love became more and more akin to social work, in accordance with the requirements of human society, that this effort was adapted to current methods, that is to say to the limitations which human society had set itself. The weakening of spiritual ascendancy over mankind coincided with the growing power of the State—the State which is becoming more and more "total", whose highest ideal is the sovereign nation. Is it surprising that social work, in so far as it accepted the possibilities offered by the State, and conformed to the restrictions laid down by it, should have lost its universal inspiration? But let us put the matter more

clearly and more fairly; if those limitations, this acceptance of the needs and purposes of the State, and this loss of inspiration, are more or less obvious, so far as the organisation and work of the Social Service are concerned, that is far from being the case in regard to the social worker himself.

As we all know, the social worker cannot in the long run carry on his work unless he is supported by an ideal, an aspiration towards the universal. The true social worker will therefore feel happier if the work he is called upon to do goes, in its essentials, beyond the limitations to which we have referred above and which, for practical reasons, will always be inevitable. We perceive here one of the reasons why members of our organisation—social workers and others—who left for foreign lands where conditions were arduous and sometimes even practically intolerable during the post-war years—considered themselves to be happier in the midst of those difficulties than in the safe and orderly conditions they formerly enjoyed in their home country, Switzerland.

Now that technical methods are applied in all spheres of life, and have spread in turn to all the countries of the world, the welfare of the people has come to depend more and more upon their interdependence; in numerous fields solutions are no longer practical except on the international level; this is also true of social work; some of its problems can only be solved by taking into account the equality of all men and the interdependence of the nations. It may be said that social workers, by their increasing concern for these questions, are fulfilling their true destiny. In assisting a necessarily limited number of persons, they can and must be conscious that they serve a cause—that of humanity. Every social worker is therefore a servant of humanity.

What particular sense may be given, then, to the term “international social worker”?

We should like to enlarge the conception of the international social worker to some extent, and not confine it to those social workers, for instance, who perform their duties in a foreign land, on behalf of an international organisation, and who are

engaged on social work in the strict sense of the term. We are thinking more particularly of members of the staff of international, or even national, bodies who work abroad, the representatives of private or intergovernmental organisations (World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation, UNESCO, UNICEF, the representatives of UN Technical Assistance, etc.), also Red Cross delegates, and missionaries. For the fundamental question with which we are dealing is the same for all concerned ; they go among a people belonging to another civilisation than their own, with the intention and the conviction of bringing them something useful and good, the Christian message, a humanitarian idea, or again new knowledge, methods or practices for the protection of health, or rational methods for the improvement of agricultural or economic production.

Efforts, more and more numerous, are being made in all fields to help destitute populations with the development of their own, still underdeveloped resources ; these efforts make it increasingly necessary for numerous experts, delegates and advisers to be sent abroad and overseas. This trend has become particularly pronounced since the last world war. Distress and poverty, the after-effects of war, had given rise—in a first phase and on different levels, international and national—to relief actions undertaken on a vaster scale than anything of the kind ever contemplated in the past. For the State was no longer content merely to view those undertakings with benevolence, but gave them direct support. When the relief actions came to an end, the conviction remained that all peoples were interdependent, and that their solidarity had been placed in evidence as a result of war and distress. Moreover, the disparity which existed, throughout the world, between the prosperity of some and the distress of others being more deeply felt, new means were sought whereby the difference could, at least to some extent, be lessened.

The need for achieving this is becoming more and more imperative. For progress in technical methods and in means of international communication does not only have the effect of accelerating the advance of industrial countries, but also,

at the same time, causes people of other nations to be more conscious of the prevailing inequality. This aggravates a tension which may become increasingly dangerous.

Just as a nation, can only enjoy true prosperity and peace when a solution to the social problem has been found, in the same way one of the essential conditions for world peace is to reduce the acute inequality which exists in the particular situation of different nations. In both cases one can only succeed through efforts and sacrifice; that is one of the fundamental aspects of the policy of modern States. Further, the conviction is gaining ground that a progressive world policy should pursue the same end.

Whereas, on the national plane, the social worker serves the cause of social justice, the international social worker, as defined by us above, is essentially the servant of an institution or organisation which, in its turn, serves the cause of international justice. If we carefully study the question of the rich and the poor on a world level, or in other words what the Abbé Pierre calls "the geography of hunger", we shall see that, with a few exceptions, the "rich" are the peoples of the West (including North America), and the "poor" are the peoples of the East (and of Africa), the only intermediate stage between the two being Latin America. One is therefore justified in saying that the activity of the international social worker must be considered in relation to the "East-West problem".

What do we mean by "East-West problem"? There is, of course, no question of making a close, historical and philosophical study here of relations between the East and the West. We are merely considering the most recent aspect of a problem with which members of the Eastern and Western worlds are increasingly faced, in the most varied fields—political, economical, scientific and spiritual—when they come into contact with each other and, especially, when they live in a country which is not their own, in a civil community to which they do not belong.

We are not only dealing here with the problem which emerges from contacts between different civilisations, and about which there is in fact nothing particularly new. For those contacts

have always existed and although they have multiplied since the era of discoveries, they go back to ancient times.

Even at the epoch of imperialism, of the European colonial domination over the people of Asia and other parts of the world, the East-West problem was not viewed from the same angle as it is today, and as we wish to envisage it here. For in the past it was essentially a matter of relations between strangers, who remained strangers for each other, that is to say men of different worlds, beings whom one loved or hated, but who were merely a subject of curiosity; use was made of their products, their wealth was exploited, collections of their art treasures were built up; or again, certain fashions were copied, customs were imitated or processes adopted; but the presence of the two races had no effect upon the basic foundations of life or the fundamental beliefs of either.

Today we are all spectators, often participants, and it may be that—in a more or less near future and to a varying degree—we shall also be the victims of a radical transformation of the structure of the world and the relations between the different parties concerned. In Eastern countries, which hold more than one half of the human race, and which were already civilised at a time when the Western peoples' ancestors were still cave or lake dwellers, the opinion is held that relations with the West have been essentially characterised by military invasions for commercial purposes. Hence a resentment which, even if it is often but dimly felt by the masses, is extremely acute among the political and spiritual leaders at the top. Mere palliative measures will not suffice to remove either the suspicion or the rancour engendered by a profound upheaval—imposed by force—in the social, economic, political and spiritual fields. The mere study of the questions raised by the upheaval will call for very great patience on our part.

From the message brought from the West, a great many Orientals have drawn formulas which in their opinion can and should be used as a means of retaliation against those who brought them to their knowledge. They use them as a defensive and offensive weapon to combat what they regard as imperialism in another form. It would be futile to blame them for this, but

useful to seek to understand their attitude, in order that the repercussion may not be too disastrous in its consequences for all concerned.

The East-West problem resides, above all, in the following fact ; the relations between men and institutions of the East, and the peoples of the West, have necessarily emerged from a background of historical events which are at present giving rise to serious consequences in political, economical, psychological and spiritual matters. Moreover, all international (intergovernmental or private) organisations and institutions realise that, in order to carry out their work in Eastern countries—that is to say non-European (for all such bodies are of Western origin and structure)—it is essential that their representatives should be anxious for their relations with the people among whom they work to be solidly established and fruitful. It is essential, in fact absolutely necessary, that the relations on both sides should be established in a spirit of justice, mutual respect and with the fullest possible understanding of each other's mental structure and attitude.

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