

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

SOUTH EAST ASIA DISASTER RELIEF SEMINAR

One of the unfortunate areas of the world, where disasters strike almost relentlessly, is the South East Asian region—not less than 60 international appeals having been launched for the period 1946-1966. The magnitude of the disasters has invariably caused untold hardships to the local population and has, by the same token, given the Red Cross Societies in this area added responsibilities. These frequent challenges reflect the difficult situation in which the National Societies find themselves, and the solution of this problem lies in enhanced regional and international co-operation, far-sighted planning and the training of leaders. This was recognised at the first regional Seminar organised under the Red Cross Development Programme in Sydney in May-June 1964, and it was then felt that a technical seminar on the subject of Disaster Relief, most important to the Societies in this region, should be held in the near future. The Board of Governors meetings at Vienna, in the autumn of 1965, confirmed this need and accepted the offer of the Singapore Red Cross Society to be host.

The Seminar was held in Singapore from the 2nd to the 9th May 1966 and was attended by delegates from the National Societies in the following countries—Australia, Ceylon, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam, together with observers from the following National Societies—British, Laotian, Malaysian, Singapore and Swedish.¹

The objectives for this Seminar were as follows:

To further develop and strengthen the National Societies in the South East Asian area through—

- a) The mutual exchange of practical experiences and programmes in the specific field of disaster relief ;

¹ *Plate* : Singapore Seminar. Mr. Fok Fook Choon greeting participants.

- b) The consideration of the special needs and problems of the National Societies in this regard ;
- c) The examination of pre-disaster planning possibilities for the benefit of the National Societies ; and
- d) The development of relationships between the League and the National Societies.

The South East Asia Disaster Relief Seminar, the first of its nature, was declared open by the President of the Republic of Singapore, Inche Yusof bin Ishak, Patron of the Singapore Red Cross Society. In his opening remarks the President said : " Very often a disaster strikes with little or no warning and plans for disaster relief must be made in advance. While the welfare of the people affected by disaster is the immediate concern of the Government of the country where the disaster has occurred, the Red Cross has a very important role to play in providing emergency assistance with the basic necessities of life on the basis of the greatest help to the greatest need. By its principles, chief among which are the principles of neutrality, impartiality and universality, the Red Cross is eminently suited to play this role."

The need and value of such a Seminar was stressed by the Acting Minister for Health, the Honorable Mr. Jek Yuen Thong, who stated that " This programme to bring together representatives of nations from this region to discuss this all important subject so necessary in this part of the world is indeed an excellent one and the Development Programme of the League of Red Cross Societies is to be congratulated for organising this Seminar on a regional basis."

Finally, Mr. H. Mathiesen, Chairman of the Seminar, expressed his thanks and on behalf of Mr. H. Beer, Secretary-General of the League, stressed the constant development of the Red Cross movement, its training of nursing personnel and the effectiveness of its relief actions. " Since the League started its work, it and the National Societies have been planning, co-ordinating and executing development programmes. . . Every Society is in need of development aid, but some more than others."

The programme of the Seminar covered the various aspects of Disaster Relief and each subject was presented by a represen-

tative of the various delegations present. The subjects discussed were :

*Responsibility of Red Cross in Disaster Relief*¹
Basic Principles of Red Cross in Disaster Relief
Survey of Needs
Feeding, Shelter and Clothing
Medical and Nursing Care and Welfare
Public and Human Relations
Development of Volunteer Activities relating to Disaster
Communications and Transportation
Pre-Disaster Planning
Coordination with Government and other Organisations
Relief to Victims of Conflict
International Assistance
Asian Disaster Relief Store.

The highlight of the discussions during the whole of the Seminar was the need for adequate pre-disaster planning and the importance of it was discussed in detail and reference to this aspect was made at every session. It was recognised that this should be a joint responsibility of the Government and the Red Cross, in cooperation with all other agencies in a position to assist in time of disaster. Reference was made to the resolutions of the United Nations urging Governments to set up national planning and operating machinery for disaster relief and that it was the duty of the National Red Cross Societies to offer to participate in the creation of a National Disaster Relief Committee, together with the carrying out of subsequent duties involved in disaster relief. The various technical details in disaster pre-planning were thoroughly studied and it was suggested that as a pre-disaster planning measure the League draw up a "vulnerability chart" of disasters in South East

¹ This subject was introduced by Miss Shirley Robertson of the League and the discussion resulted in the following resolution.

RESPONSIBILITY OF RED CROSS IN DISASTER RELIEF

1. Responsibility of National Societies to give assistance to disaster victims in the emergency period should include welfare services.
2. If National Societies desire assistance to help them carry out these responsibilities they should apply through the League Secretary-General to the Development Programme.

Asia, both of national and international magnitude. In sending such information to National Societies an indication should be given by the League of the types of disasters to be anticipated in the various countries and the types of relief most likely to be required so that Societies could be better prepared to help themselves and their neighbours.

In order to assist those National Societies which have not yet developed their pre-disaster planning, it was recommended that the League establish a study group on disaster relief for the South East Asia area, the members of which should be drawn from the Societies in this region and could be made available on loan to other National Societies on request—

- a) to assist in their pre-disaster planning ;
- b) to study and evaluate their pre-disaster plans with the aim in view of strengthening such plans ;
- c) to conduct leadership training courses ;
- d) to help in major relief operations.

Another point that held the interest of the participants was "Relief to Victims of Conflict" following a most informative lecture given by the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr A. Durand. The presentation emphasized the part to be played by the National Societies and the need for legal, medical and military personnel to be instructed in detail on the Geneva Conventions and for information of the public on the provisions contained therein.¹ The various responsibilities of National Societies in this regard were also mentioned and discussed as well as specific questions interesting particularly the National Societies in these regions.

¹ A recommendation more especially concerning the ICRC was adopted on the subject.

RELIEF TO VICTIMS OF CONFLICT

It is recommended that—

1. the ICRC establish more regular communication with National Societies on their responsibilities arising from the Geneva Conventions.
2. National Societies study Resolution XXI of the International Conference of the Red Cross held in Vienna in 1965 concerning the implementation and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and take every possible step to carry out this Resolution.

The cooperation of National Societies with the Government and other organisations also held interest to the participants and this subject was presented through a panel composed of representatives from the WHO, World Alliance of YMCA, CARE, Catholic Relief Services and Church World Service. The information provided concerning the programme of these organisations was instructive and the desire expressed by all that there should be closer cooperation with the National Societies in the task of helping disaster victims was well received.

The Seminar ended on Monday the 9th May with the adoption of report and recommendations.

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NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EAST NATIONAL SOCIETY SEMINAR

The first regional seminar for North African and Middle East National Societies was held in Rabat, from May 23 to 28, 1966. This important event was organized jointly by the League of Red Cross Societies and the Moroccan Red Crescent.¹

Twelve National Societies of the Middle East and North Africa took part in this meeting, namely: Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, the Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. In addition, four European Red Cross Societies (France, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland) were invited by the Moroccan Red Crescent to send observers. There were also observers present from seven intergovernmental or voluntary societies, notably the WHO and UNICEF.

¹ *Plate*: A working session.