

In the Red Cross and Red Crescent World

NATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

THE ALBANIAN RED CROSS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The Albanian Red Cross, founded in 1921, will celebrate its 70th anniversary in December. Its history, like that of its country, has been marked by alternating periods of intense activity and temporary stagnation.

The trend in Albania in recent months towards greater openness to the outside world and possible democratic reform of the State has had a stimulating effect on the National Society. As remarked by Thierry Germond, ICRC Delegate General for Europe and North America, and Jean-François Berger, Regional Delegate for the Balkan States, during a mission to the country in December 1990, "the Albanian Red Cross has entered a period of renewal".

The first sign of renewal was the National Society's decision, formally adopted by governmental decree in 1989, to reorganize itself and lay fresh foundations for its activities or, in the words of its current President, Dr. Çiril Pistoli, to "recharge its batteries".

The ICRC welcomed this approach and has undertaken to give the National Society short- and medium-term support in strengthening its operational capacity by providing material assistance, training its staff at the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva and helping it to set up a dissemination programme.

*The Review will continue to keep its readers informed of the National Society's progress and is pleased to publish below an article by the President of the Albanian Red Cross retracing its history from the 1920s to the present.**

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The Albanian Red Cross, which was founded on 30 December 1931, was recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross and became a member of the League of Red Cross Societies on 2 August 1923.

* An earlier version of this article appeared in the Albanian Red Cross periodical *Shkenca dhe Jeta*, No. 3, 1990. Its title here is given by the *Review*.

At that time the National Society was not yet a broad-based voluntary association. Its 600 members carried out mainly charitable work. During the 1920s the Albanian Red Cross thus ran an orphanage, set up a dispensary in Tirana, where two doctors and a nurse provided free medical care for the indigent, and opened a soup kitchen. In 1937 it also founded a nursing school.

During Albania's occupation by fascist forces the National Society came under the control of the authorities in Rome. Not long after, it was dissolved.

After the country's liberation, the Albanian Red Cross was re-established. In 1946 a congress was convened at which 80 delegates adopted new Statutes and elected a General Council of 11 members and a President, Vice-President and Secretary General.

National Society branches headed by elected committees were set up in every district of the country. Membership of the Albanian Red Cross rose from 11,500 in 1946 to 160,000 in 1962. Since then it has grown even more rapidly and has now become a broad-based voluntary association with democratically elected leaders.

After its re-establishment the Albanian Red Cross launched various humanitarian activities to help communities cope with the aftermath of the war. It thus set up an orphanage for destitute children and a home for the elderly, the sick and the needy, organized distributions of milk for children and ran a soup kitchen. While continuing to assist destitute families and orphans, the Albanian Red Cross then set up medical and social programmes for war invalids and the victims of natural disasters.

In order to bolster the medical services in its country, the National Society founded another nursing school. It also organized first-aid training for volunteers, who subsequently manned first-aid posts in their workplaces. In all these ways the Albanian Red Cross has endeavoured over the years to keep pace with its country's economic and social development.

The National Society has been particularly active in recent months following the elections held in each district in the first half of 1990 and the National Conference convened in Tirana on 27 June 1990, which adopted the Society's new programmes.

The Albanian Red Cross intends not only to continue its activities in its traditional fields (assistance to the needy, primary health care, etc.), but also to break new ground. In the area of health education, it plans not only to cooperate with the public health institutions but also to organize its own programmes, in particular for the elderly. It intends also to launch blood collection campaigns and to set up a programme to assist the parents of children in nursery and elementary schools.

A priority task for the National Society is to improve the training of Red Cross first-aid workers so as to create a network of volunteers who will provide care not only in schools, enterprises and agricultural co-operatives,

but also at public gatherings (assemblies, parades and athletic events). Another priority task is to increase its preparedness to provide medical care in the event of natural disasters. In this area, the Albanian Red Cross, as a member of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, may if necessary call on the International Red Cross for support.

The National Society's other major priorities are to provide social and medical assistance for elderly persons living at home and needing constant attention, to care for invalids and to help Albanian citizens to restore ties with their relatives abroad.

Within the framework of these various activities, the National Society intends also to develop its relations with sister Societies abroad.

The Albanian Red Cross is confident that its 300,000 members, mainly young people, will ensure the success of its new programmes.
