

“RED CROSS : YOUR EMERGENCY LIFELINE”

National Societies commemorate Henry Dunant's birthday every year, and the 8th of May has become World Red Cross Day. As we announced in our January issue, the theme chosen for 1975 is Red Cross: your emergency lifeline. The League of Red Cross Societies has prepared a kit with various documents, posters and photographs concerning the activities of National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies in emergencies. We reproduce below the editorial with which the documentation opens, and hope that the World Day soon to be commemorated in many countries will meet with complete success.

Disasters, natural or man-made, are one human ill that science is unlikely to eliminate in the predictable future. Instead efforts must focus on preparedness and on the swift, efficient supply of disaster relief.

Red Cross, an international disaster veteran, has long recognized that the days of well-meaning charity are over. Help that doesn't match needs, arrives too late, or isn't distributed, is no help at all. Instead Red Cross is developing an international force of trained disaster specialists, a purchasing network, a reservoir of technical and logistical know-how, to do justice to the public's generosity.

In this development, the Red Cross has helped pioneer the only rational approach to the disaster problem: countries in disaster-prone areas must be prepared for the worst—with a national emergency relief plan of action. Many of the world's 122 National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies are actively involved with the authorities to which they are auxiliaries in developing such plans and translating them into reality by training volunteers and regularly rehearsing for action, assuring a minimum stock of relief items and means of communication and transport.

The international nature, impartiality and neutrality of the Red Cross stand it in good stead, enabling it to respond quickly to needs in many different situations.

Despite its harnessing of modern technology, the Red Cross intends to remain a relief agency with a human dimension. It knows its most important asset is its human resources—millions of men, women and young people who channel their urge to help through their National Society. In an age when the individual feels he counts for less, Red Cross is saying people matter—and holding out a lifeline.

SYMPOSIUM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RED CROSS IN AFRICA

A symposium on the development of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Africa, organized by the League of Red Cross Societies, took place at Montreux, Switzerland, from 24 February to 8 March. Representatives of 34 African and of a dozen other National Societies took part. Dr Eric Martin, President of the ICRC, addressed the opening session, emphasizing the vital role facing the Red Cross in a world still dominated too often by instability and violence. On the occasion of ICRC Day, 7 March, the ICRC delegate-general for Africa summarized the main lines of the institution's activities in Africa, especially in the field of assistance to prisoners.

Food aid supplied by the ICRC and distributed by the National Societies, and the diffusion of humanitarian law and the principles of the Red Cross were two of the subjects of lectures and animated discussions.

The symposium was important for a number of reasons and we shall mention it again next month.