

# NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Formerly: International Bulletin of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1869

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## Finland

The Finnish Red Cross has recently published a Summary in English of the development of its activities since its formation in 1877 to the present day<sup>1</sup>. We have the pleasure of bringing to the notice of our readers, all the efforts which this Society has made and which has become today a great progressive National Society acting with remarkable energy in bringing aid to its own country and elsewhere.

The first chapter, "The Origin and Development of the Finnish Red Cross", traces in broad outline the path which this Red Cross Society has followed, not without encountering many difficulties, until becoming "a broadly based citizens' organization in which all strata of the population are represented". A citizens' meeting held at Helsinki City Hall on May 7, 1877 decided to found the "Finnish Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers". As Finland was not an independent nation at that time, this association could not be accepted as a National Red Cross Society. The Society worked from the outset, however, on exactly the same lines as other national Red Cross organizations. The first task of the new Society was to fit out a large ambulance unit for the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. Later the Society and its successor, the Finnish Red Cross, sent ambulance units to several other foreign theatres of war, notably during the Russo-Japanese War.

In Finland's War of Independence in 1918 the Society was called upon for the first time to work at home in conditions of war. It ran

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<sup>1</sup> Finnish Red Cross, Helsinki.

war hospitals, organized ambulance services, made itself responsible for the collection and identification of the dead, etc.

The Society also began at a fairly early stage to engage in peacetime work. It established, for example, temporary hospitals for infectious diseases; it also trained nurses, organized public lectures on public health and arranged first-aid courses. In years of crop failure the Society organized collections for the distressed.

In 1922 the Society which had shown such activity was recognized by the ICRC. With General Baron C. G. Mannerheim as its president, the Finnish Red Cross was completely reorganized and the following years were "a time of vigorous development". Apart from important new measures which were taken during that period, the nurses' reserve was established in 1926 and courses in first-aid and home nursing were increased.

During the world crisis in the 1930s, the Society helped a total of 100,000 adults and 160,000 children. It also extensively prepared itself for all eventualities even for the needs of war-time operation. It was well that it had done so, since during the years 1939-1944 it experienced "its first real baptism of fire" and was able to place at the disposal of the army its nurses' reserve, numerous field hospitals, ambulance cars and medical supplies. It also gave assistance to the civilian population and started the rehabilitation and vocational training of the disabled.

After the war many new forms of work were started, for example blood service, the care of the aged, and a Junior Section. Thus in a short space of time the Finnish Red Cross had become a great organization reaching all parts of the country, which was divided into 15 districts working under *District Committees*, with more than 600 Local Branches, consisting of numerous village clubs, first-aid groups, youth groups, etc.

The text of this booklet, which is brief and concise, is amply illustrated: men engaged in transporting a wounded man, a voluntary first-aid group of ship-yard workers rehearsing first-aid in Helsinki, two women, one of whom plays the rôle of invalid, the other of the nurse, and an example of home nursing. The Society

also carries out important activities in its Hospital for Plastic Surgery, dealing in the majority of cases with children with congenital malformations, cleft palates and hare-lips, etc. A home for children with speech defects has also been established in Helsinki for their re-education and in which the Junior Red Cross actively participates.

It seems that one of the most interesting aspects of the activities of the Finnish Red Cross is the way in which these are extended far beyond the populated centres. In fact it maintains a hospital at Utsjoki, 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle, which serves the inhabitants of the frontier regions between Finland and Norway, and of which the majority of patients are expectant mothers. One photograph depicts a young woman in picturesque costume who would appear to be having her name recorded with a view to being shortly admitted to that hospital.

Further on one can see an air ambulance in a landscape of snow and ice about to take off with a sick child and elsewhere there is a picture of a comfortable motor ambulance on a road covered with snow. How far this all seems from the first horse-drawn ambulance ! Thus it can be seen that the rigours of the climate in no way affect this Society's possibilities of responding to urgent appeals, thanks to the enterprising spirit of its directors and to the devotion of its assistants.

One need only say in this connection that all trained nurses in Finland are members " of the nurses' reserve of the Finnish Red Cross ". They thus undertake to place themselves at the service of their country in the event of catastrophe, thousands of whom made an invaluable contribution during the Second World War.

The aged are singled out for particular attention which is based on the principle that an opportunity should be given for as many healthy old people as possible to live in their own homes until a late age. The Red Cross provides comfort and diversion for these all over the country, which is a large undertaking. The organization runs numerous clubs in which old people can find interesting occupations and make new friends. Recreational and occupational therapy is also widely given. Furthermore, the Finnish Red Cross has home-

help bureaux from which the aged can obtain home-helpers. A special meal service provides hot meals in the home. These tasks are usually undertaken by volunteers.

Finally, the Red Cross cares for disabled ex-servicemen: an artificial limb workshop, which was originally established for disabled ex-servicemen, still functions although at the present moment it deals in the majority of cases with civilians.

The Finnish Red Cross is also aware of its international responsibilities and since it is mindful of the considerable assistance which it received from the Red Cross organization of other countries, it considers that its turn has come to go to the aid of others beyond its own frontiers. The willingness of the Finnish people to help was clearly seen at the time of the events in Hungary in 1956. The Finnish Red Cross in fact received money and goods to a total of 200 million Finnish marks, which enabled it to deliver more than 730,000 Kg. of much needed supplies to the Hungarians. In addition Finnish Red Cross teams participated in refugee work in Hungarian camps in Austria.

This booklet refers to numerous other events in which this Society has also participated. It brings out most vividly the fine progress of an idea pursued to the best ends with the human possibilities available.

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Under the title *Genèven Sopimukset*, the Finnish Red Cross has just published a Finnish translation of the illustrated handbook on the Geneva Conventions, edited jointly by the ICRC and the League<sup>1</sup>. This collection is excellently presented and will enable teachers and instructors to bring the Geneva Conventions within the grasp of their pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> We reviewed this handbook at the time of its publication in the *Revue internationale*, August, 1960.

Thus the Finnish public can be introduced to the Geneva Conventions such as they have been condensed into a methodical, illustrated and commented summary by the two international institutions of the Red Cross, in accordance with the proposals of the Nineteenth International Conference.

It is of great interest for the universality of the Red Cross that this work has been translated into a language other than the official languages of the International Red Cross. It is therefore to be hoped that the example of this National Society will be followed by as many other Societies as possible, for the existence of the essential points of the Geneva Conventions in a large number of different languages contributes in a considerable measure towards the comprehension and dissemination of these texts, which should be understood in the same way everywhere and thus become equally familiar to all men in all countries.

These Conventions have now been ratified throughout the world. They constitute the law of nations at war or in the event of armed conflicts of a non-international character. Moreover, the spirit which conceived them and which governs the work of the Red Cross is at all times a powerful stimulant in the sphere of social service inside each State, as well as in that of international aid in the event of natural disasters.

In making the Geneva Conventions better understood, this little book contributes towards mutual aid between nations and thus serves the cause of peace in the world. The Finnish Red Cross is therefore to be congratulated on its initiative.