

NEPAL

The National Red Cross Society of Nepal, which was recognized by the ICRC in October 1964, is now just over twelve years old. It has the warm support of the Nepalese royal family—indeed, it was Her Royal Highness Princess Princep Shah, a dynamic and much-loved figure in the country, who founded the Society and who is today its President.

The Kingdom of Nepal is a long strip of territory between the tropical valley of the River Ganges and the icy peaks of the Tibetan frontier. It has very varied climatic conditions, ranging from the steamy heat of the southern plain, with its thriving crops and lush jungle, through the temperate climate of the central region, where lie Katmandu and other cities, to the aridity and bitter cold in the Himalayan foothills which fill the north and west of the country. It is in the mountains that living conditions are especially harsh: the immense height of the mountain barriers causes some communities to be completely cut off for several months each year, and sometimes the only means of communication between one valley and another is through Indian territory. Roads are few throughout the country, and goods are moved from place to place on the backs of men and women, caravans of porters who walk with their loads for days and weeks at a time. These are the obstacles which the National Red Cross Society has to overcome in its relief operations.

The population numbers approximately eleven million, made up of two main ethnic groups, the Tibeto-Nepalese and the Indo-Aryans. But the geographical barriers dividing up the country have led to the formation of numerous sub-groups, each with its own language and culture. The official language, Nepalese, the national religion, Hinduism, strongly influenced by tantric Buddhism, and the essential occupation, agriculture, which engages ninety per cent of the population, supply a cohesive force between the very divergent groups of Nepalese.

In this country where life is a perpetual struggle against the difficulties of climate and topography, a National Red Cross Society was created and is growing. In addition to the headquarters in the capital, Katmandu,

there are already 62 Red Cross branches in the 75 administrative districts of the kingdom. The Society has about 14,000 members, and 30,000 young Nepalese belong to the Junior Red Cross.

The Nepalese Red Cross is at present trying to set up an organization on a national scale to take action in the event of natural disasters. It has the help of an expert on loan from the League of Red Cross Societies and the Swedish Red Cross. In a country like Nepal, where the terrain is so rugged, and where the summer monsoon and the winter gales are of great violence, natural disasters are frequent and their victims numerous. For example, in 1976, there were floods followed by landslides in 27 districts, and 309 people lost their lives. In 22 provinces, forests, crops and villages were ravaged by fire. To the victims of these catastrophes, the Red Cross of Nepal brings medicines, clothing, blankets, sometimes tents, and extra food in the form of milk powder. The district committees, under the general direction of the Katmandu headquarters, take charge of the distribution of relief in their own regions.

The Nepalese Red Cross set up a blood bank in Katmandu in 1966, the first establishment of the kind in the country. It has proved its value and efficacy, and the Society has plans to open other blood banks in the provinces.

In 1965, the Society launched an ambulance service in the capital, and this has now been extended to nine other cities. Mobile clinics operate in various parts of the country, providing a much-needed service to isolated communities. These clinics also accompany the major religious pilgrimages which take place in Nepal. Each mobile clinic has a team of doctors, nurses and para-medical staff. In areas remote from any urban centre, the Society also runs "eye camps" in which thousands of people suffering from various eye troubles are treated each year.

The ICRC had its school book, "The Red Cross and My Country", printed in Nepalese in 1971. Since that date several tens of thousands of copies have been sent to the Ministry of Education in Nepal. As a complement to this work of spreading knowledge of the Geneva Conventions and humanitarian principles, the Nepalese Red Cross organizes public courses of instruction in these subjects, and includes discussion of them in the bulletins it publishes for the information of the general public.

All these activities require a large amount of funds. The National Red Cross Society of Nepal has to make great efforts to collect the money: it organizes campaigns to collect funds from the population, and a monthly lottery provides a regular source of income. In addition, the takings from certain football matches, film shows, etc., are given to the

Society. It receives financial aid from the Royal Nepalese Government; finally, many National Societies have come to the help of the Nepalese Red Cross over the years, to contribute to its development. The Society has many plans and projects which it has not yet been able to carry out, and depends on the continuing support of other Societies.

TRAINING SEMINAR FOR FUTURE DELEGATES OF THE FINNISH RED CROSS

The Finnish Red Cross organized a training seminar for future delegates to be made available to the International Red Cross (the ICRC or the League of Red Cross Societies) for relief work abroad. The seminar was held at Keurusselkä, about 300 km north of Helsinki, from 31 January to 4 February 1977.

All 30 participants were volunteers, most of them members of medical or para-medical professions, and prepared to make themselves available on a voluntary basis to the Red Cross for several months at a time. Some of them had already taken part in an International Red Cross mission for the ICRC, in Lebanon or Angola, for example. Others were about to go to Bangladesh for the League of Red Cross Societies. Each of the Scandinavian National Societies had sent a representative to the Keurusselkä seminar.

Courses were given by Mr. Kai Warras, Secretary General of the Finnish Red Cross and director of the seminar, by Mr. Philippe Grand d'Hauteville of the ICRC, and by Mr. Jürgen Weyand and Mr. Hiroshi Higashiura of the League of Red Cross Societies.

The programme included lectures on the ICRC, the League, the Geneva Conventions, the various bodies which constitute the International Red Cross, their functions and activities, and a number of practical exercises based on recent operations. In addition, Finnish specialists, a doctor, an anthropologist, a delegate recently returned from mission, and an officer of the Finnish Army described their experiences with the Red Cross.

An identical seminar was organized by the Finnish Red Cross last November, and was a great success. The participants in the January course were greatly impressed by the few days of study and practical exercises. The Finnish Red Cross has therefore decided to organize more such seminars.

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