

Algeria

The Algerian Red Crescent Society issues a quarterly review called *Informations*. It is intended, as Mr. Belaouane, President of the National Society, writes in an introduction, "to make known, especially abroad, the Algerian Red Crescent. It will appear in Arabic. The first version to appear in a foreign language will be in French. Later, editions in other languages might be envisaged". However, *El Hilal*, the bulletin which has been appearing already for some time, will continue to come out, but will contain mainly local news features, articles on the everyday events of the Committees and detailed accounts of emergency actions.

The first issue of this new magazine, which has just been received in Geneva, is profusely illustrated and attractively presented. There are various articles on the Society's current activities in Algeria and its extensive relief action for disaster victims, on the World Day celebration of May 1971 and the actions undertaken by the Algerian Red Crescent in Pakistan and Jordan, in addition to accounts of various Red Cross and Red Crescent meetings in Arab countries.

This number opens with an article, reprinted below, devoted to a particularly interesting action being carried out by the National Society, under the heading "Why the Red Crescent is engaged in the re-afforestation of the desert":

«The Algerian Red Crescent is at present carrying out a programme of re-afforestation in the desert. Operations began in 1965 in the Bou-Saada area, where 110,000 trees have been planted to date. A further stage of this project is in course of execution, involving the planting of 70,000 more trees.

The purpose of this "Green Front" operation is of paramount importance, because it consists in combating three fundamental features weighing heavily upon the living conditions of our populations in those regions which are being threatened by the advance of the sands of the Sahara, in other words, by impoverishment.

Operation "Green Front" therefore attacks the desert's progress and aims at the same time to reduce unemployment by the hiring of labour for the re-afforestation of land, the development

of market gardening zones and the creation of what is called a micro-climatic region.

The advance of the Sahara.—The extension of desert areas has often been compared, not inappropriately, to an infection of leprosy. At first, in the region attacked by the desert, small barren spots are observed here and there; they then develop progressively until such time when the entire area has become wholly unfit for cultivation. A similar phenomenon was observed in Morocco, where the plain between Tiznit and Agadir was dramatically transformed. The light soil that covered it was changed into a totally unproductive, arid waste. Sand was blown on the roads forming drifts which had to be cleared by gangs of workmen specially drafted for that task.

In order to understand the extent and the gravity of the problem raised by the encroachment of the Sahara, it must be realized that most people today agree that that whole region was, not so many centuries before, under vegetation.

Changes in climate on the one hand, and the indiscriminate grazing of the vegetation by goats and camels on the other, contributed greatly to the gradual impoverishment of the land and to the disappearance of the woods. The livestock fed on young trees and saplings and stopped all natural regeneration.

That is the reason why any project of re-afforestation must include plans as to requirements in food and animal feeds.

The struggle to reduce unemployment.—The projects set up by the Red Crescent in the areas on the edge of the Sahara have provided work for many unemployed. The jobs are carried out on a full-time principle and allow workmen to benefit from Red Crescent assistance in exchange for the work executed on the sites. Furthermore, the inhabitants participating in Red Crescent actions know that they will be the first to benefit from them, as their aim is the improvement of their very condition of existence. In this respect, it must be emphasized that a significant proportion of the Red Crescent programme goes to the establishment and development of market gardening. In other words, it is indeed a programme for the restoration of land the gains of which will flow to the inhabitants themselves.

Creation of a new climate.—It is common knowledge that green belts produce humidity, leading to the formation and condensation of clouds and to rainfall. At present, these cloud formations either pass over arid zones without falling as rain or else they evaporate. Hence, there is a constantly decreasing amount of rain in regions which, before anything else, require water in order that they might flourish and that animal and vegetable life might be possible under suitable conditions. But the volume of rainfall gets less as the desert encroaches upon the vegetation; consequently the disappearance of plants leads to the establishment of a drier climate. For, though rain is essential to the birth of vegetation, the latter in its turn plays a significant role in the conditions propitious for rainfall.

Trees, that is to say the creation of forests, help to reduce floods and to make better use of precipitations. When the earth is hard and dry, water quickly runs off the surface in torrential streams without being conserved by infiltration into the soil. Strong torrents rush down valleys, sweeping along everything in their path and often causing disasters.

Trees are therefore useful for the retention of soil and for the prevention of erosion. They furnish shelter for food and forage crops, stabilize hydrographic networks and produce humus.

The action carried out by the Red Crescent in this respect is therefore of great importance, although it is only a part of the extensive programmes set up by the authorities. »

Switzerland

The 86th general meeting of Swiss Red Cross delegates took place in Lausanne on 5 and 6 June 1971 under the chairmanship of Professor Hans Haug, president of the National Society.

Mr. Marcel A. Naville conveyed the ICRC's good wishes and delivered an address in which, after expressing the gratitude of the institution of which he is president, for the generous support which the Swiss Red Cross has unfailingly given to the ICRC, he reviewed the various occasions on which the International Committee was