

Philippines

We have pleasure in publishing this article by the Secretary-General of the Philippine Red Cross on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions. Dr. Calasanz is particularly qualified to discuss this important subject and his contribution is much appreciated.

It should be recalled that the history of the Philippines has a long humanitarian tradition. Reference to this was appropriately made by Mr. Carlos P. Romulo, President of the University of the Philippines, during the last National Convention of the Red Cross in Manila.

He mentioned the devotion shown by so many women of that country and in particular by Trinidad Tecson who, seriously wounded herself in the fighting at Zaratoga, left the field of battle to care for the casualties. Amongst many others, the name was recalled of Josephine Bracken, Rizol's widow, who set up a field hospital at Tejeros.

Mr. Romulo ended his address by paying tribute to the Red Cross volunteers. "They continue to be loyal to the cause of humanity—and this in itself speaks of a great faith specially in these our times when humanity is threatened by the terrible implications of the technology of our society".

The Dissemination of the Geneva Conventions in the Philippines

The Republic of the Philippines acceded to the Geneva Conventions on February 14, 1947, as a preparatory step to having its own National Red Cross Society. The following month its Congress passed Republic Act No. 95, which became the charter of the Philippine National Red Cross, "the voluntary organization officially designated to assist the Republic of the Philippines in discharging the obligations set forth in the Geneva Red Cross Convention and to perform such other duties as are incumbent upon a national Red Cross Society."

Since then, eighteen years ago, our Society has endeavoured through the use of different communication media, through seminars and conferences to disseminate the Geneva Conventions throughout the country among our 64 chapters or field branches.

In May, 1965, President Samuel A. Gonard, of the International Committee of the Red Cross, visited the Philippine National Red Cross to blaze the trail for the widespread diffusion of the Geneva Conventions in this part of the world. President Gonard was impressed deeply by the enthusiasm and interest of our schools and military officials to cooperate with the ICRC as evidenced by their gracious attendance at a meeting held for the purpose.

After his departure, the Philippine National Red Cross initiated a conference among representatives of our educational military establishments to work out plans for the teaching of international humanitarian law which is considered the best method of diffusing the Geneva Conventions. This action was in keeping with a promise made by the PNRC to President Gonard to make the Philippines among the first Asian countries to teach the subject. The plan of the PNRC was to make representations with the Department of Education to integrate the subject in the curricula of the first year of colleges. Meanwhile, it was agreed to hold convocations, seminars or conferences on the subject and to invite competent authorities who have made studies on the subject such as the Justices of our Supreme Court to provide the lectures.

A syllabus of the international humanitarian law courses at different levels has been prepared by a steering committee created by the Red Cross for distribution to school and military officials and other specialists and professors who may handle the subject.

The PNRC also intends to seek the cooperation and support of various media of information. Furthermore, we are preparing the publication of a localized version of a booklet on the Geneva Conventions which is being distributed the world over by the ICRC. This booklet will carry illustrations depicting the various applications of the Geneva Conventions in time of war, to be captioned in the different Philippine dialects for nation-wide distribution.

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

It will be recalled to mind that the Philippine government has long been adopting the principles of international law as part of the national law. In addition, our Supreme Court has decided several cases arising from World War II in consonance with the principles of international law as provided by the Hague Conventions of October 18, 1907.

It is worth mentioning also that long before the Philippine National Red Cross gained its independent status, way back at the time of the Fil-American hostilities, efforts had been directed by our revolutionary leaders toward the application of humanitarian principles to the war they were engaged in. Emilio Aguinaldo, President of the Philippine Republic of 1898, issued a proclamation enjoining the inhabitants "to observe strictly the customs and rules of the most civilized nations to treat prisoners of war with humane considerations." Again, two months later, Aguinaldo issued an appeal to foreign governments for recognition of his government, in which he said among other things: "The revolutionary government likewise holds nearly nine thousand prisoners-of-war, who are treated according to the rules of war of the most civilized nations and the laws of humanity."

The Geneva Conventions are man's treasured legacy and must be upheld at all times. They are a refreshing development in the history of man and his fight against the ravages of war. But while armed conflicts may be inevitable, at least they could be made more humane through a world-wide knowledge and observance of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions.

Dr. T. CALASANZ
Secretary General of the
Philippine National Red Cross.