

The ICRC is the successor of the Committee which, in 1863, undertook the task of putting Dunant's ideas into practice. Its headquarters are at Geneva.

The work of the ICRC is international, while, because of the neutrality which is essential for that work, it is composed exclusively of Swiss citizens (a maximum of twenty-five).

The ICRC is an institution which is private, independent and strictly neutral in all political, ideological and religious matters. Its humanitarian activity is part of a long-standing tradition of assistance to the victims of war. Today it is recognized in international law in virtue of the Geneva Conventions.

Within the International Red Cross, the ICRC has its own field of responsibility. Its ideals and activities keep it in close contact with the other members of this association—the national Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies and their federative body, the League of Red Cross Societies.

The ICRC is required by its Statutes to recognize new national Red Cross Societies and to maintain the Red Cross principles (neutrality, impartiality, universality, etc.). Respect of these principles ensures the moral unity, the protection and the efficacy of its activities.



What it is

What it does

As the promoter of the Geneva Conventions, which proclaim the principle of respect for the human person in time of armed conflict (whether war, civil war or internal strife), the ICRC is the principal artisan of international humanitarian law (the Geneva Law).

It develops this Law to meet the humanitarian needs of a world constantly torn by conflict. The ICRC prepares drafts for the introduction of new provisions or the revision of existing ones; these drafts are then submitted to the States which codify them in the form of international conventions. Each step forward in the Geneva Law has been the result of action by the ICRC.



1864

Geneva Convention of August 22, 1864, for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field.

Revisions: Geneva, 1906, 1929, 1949.

Adapted to maritime warfare: The Hague, 1899; Geneva, 1949.

APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTIONS THE I.C.R.C. PROTECTS THE VICTIMS OF WAR

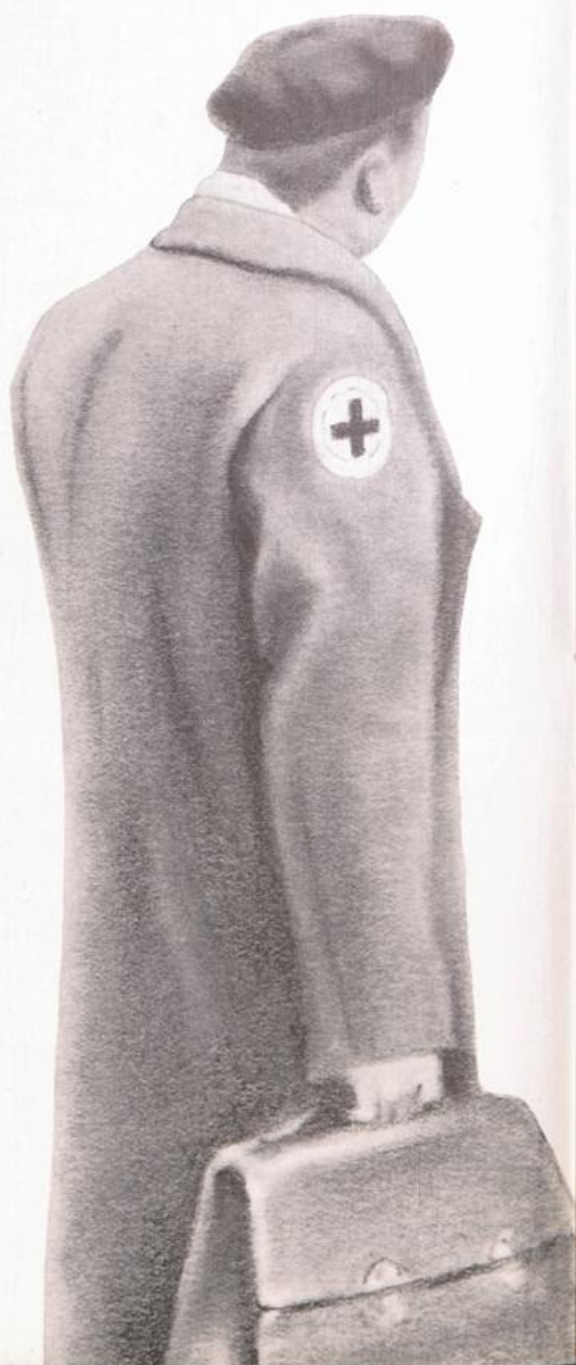
By tradition, the ICRC has its headquarters in neutral territory and is specially designated to act as a **neutral intermediary** between the opposing parties. Its intervention is intended solely to ensure respect for war victims in their capacity as human beings and to give them moral and material assistance.

ICRC delegates visit places of detention and inspect the conditions afforded to prisoners and internees. Their reports are transmitted to the Detaining Power as well as to the country of origin of the captives.

This transmission of objective reports to the Parties to the conflict, together with conciliatory action by the ICRC, results in marked improvements in the treatment and condition of war victims.

1939-1945: 11,000 camp visits.

Since 1945: In 35 countries, visits to civilian or military prisoners detained in over a thousand camps, prisons or hospitals following internal conflicts or disturbances.



1949

Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of August 12, 1949.



Geneva Convention of July 27, 1929 relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Revision: Geneva, 1949.

1929

Mortality among wounded and sick military personnel

Crimean War (1854–1856): 60 %

First World War: 7.5 %

Second World War: 2.3 %

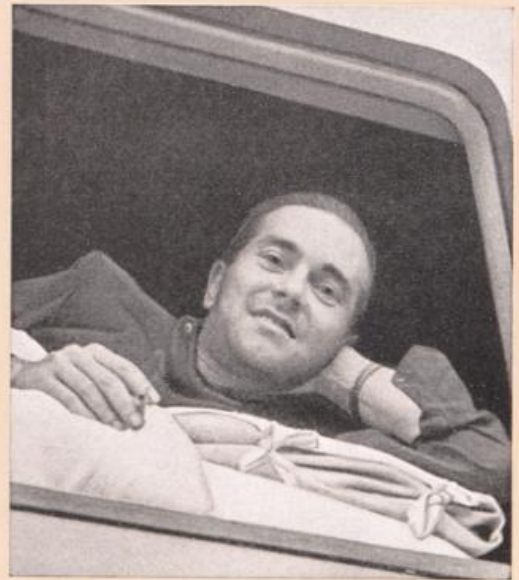
Deaths in captivity (1939–1945)

Prisoners of war protected by the Convention: 10 %

Political detainees (without legal protection): 90 %



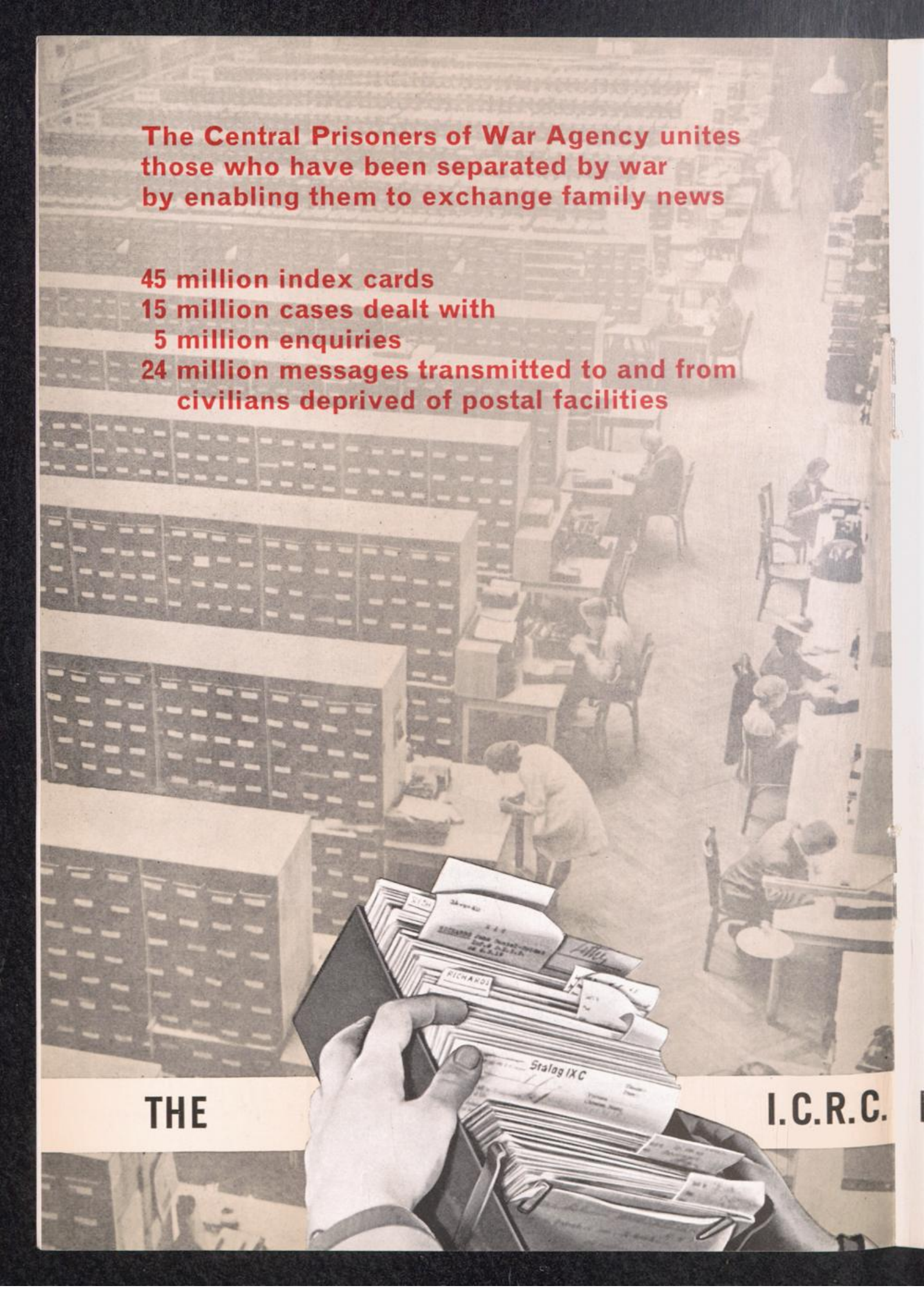
Nicaragua, 1959.
An ICRC delegate in conversation
with political detainees.



A wounded prisoner of war is
repatriated under the auspices of the
ICRC (1944).



The Suez conflict. An ICRC delegate
visits a prisoner-of-war camp.



The Central Prisoners of War Agency unites those who have been separated by war by enabling them to exchange family news

45 million index cards

15 million cases dealt with

5 million enquiries

24 million messages transmitted to and from civilians deprived of postal facilities

THE

I.C.R.C.

IN GENEVA, THE AGENCY

collects in its card-index all information likely to be of interest to families concerning prisoners of war and civilian internees (address, transfer, state of health, etc.), on the basis of documents received from the Detaining Powers and the captives themselves;

transmits to the country of origin of detainees a copy of the official nominal lists which it retains;

replies to requests by families, national Red Cross Societies and government services;

makes enquiries regarding missing persons.

The Agency does not merely concern itself with detained persons, but may also re-establish contact between civilians separated by events.

Since 1955, the ICRC has been responsible for directing the **International Tracing Service**. This Service, which has its headquarters at Arolsen (Federal Republic of Germany), is a centre for information concerning persons deported, displaced or missing either in Germany or in countries occupied by German forces during the Second World War.

25 million index cards



REUNITING OF FAMILIES

The ICRC reunites, or helps to reunite, members of families dispersed by war events. Thus, with the assistance of several national Red Cross Societies, it undertook a programme which enabled 350,000 persons of German origin from Central and Eastern Europe to be reunited, mainly in Germany and Austria.

C. ENDS THE SOLITUDE OF WAR VICTIMS

THE I.C.R.C. STRIVES TO MEET THE NEEDS

As an impartial intermediary at the service of all the victims of war (whether war between nations, civil war or internal strife), the ICRC is ideally suited to be the body which centralizes, forwards and distributes relief supplies. For the donors, it affords a guarantee that such supplies will be distributed equitably in accordance with their own wishes. The ICRC not only forwards relief supplies sent to it, but also, as far as its own resources permit, helps those who are not helped by others.



OF WAR VICTIMS



During the Second World War, 36 million parcels, worth Sw. fr. 3,500 million, were allowed to cross battle-fronts and blockades, protected by the Red Cross emblem; these parcels brought comfort to almost 3 million prisoners of war and civilian internees.

The ICRC also gave assistance to civilian war victims, who received relief supplies worth Sw. fr. 500 million; most of these supplies were administered by a special body set up jointly by the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies.



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3



Four relief actions by the ICRC made possible by the generosity of many national Red Cross Societies and individual donors:

1. Palestine (1949–1950)

Administration of relief granted by the United Nations for Arab refugees.
Value of relief supplies distributed:
Sw. fr. 144 million.

2. Greece (from 1947 on)

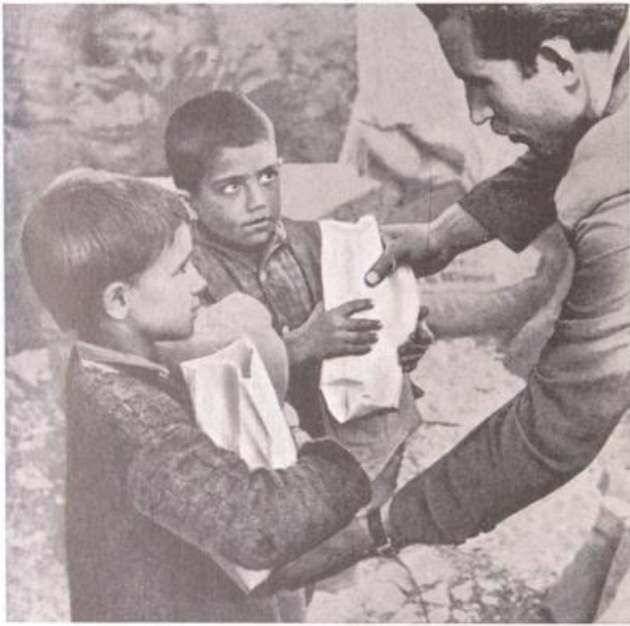
Assistance to needy civilians, exiles and political detainees.
Value of relief supplies distributed:
Sw. fr. 4.15 million

3. Hungary (1956–1957)

Assistance to the civilian population.
Value of relief supplies distributed:
Sw. fr. 85 million.

4. North Africa (from 1955 on)

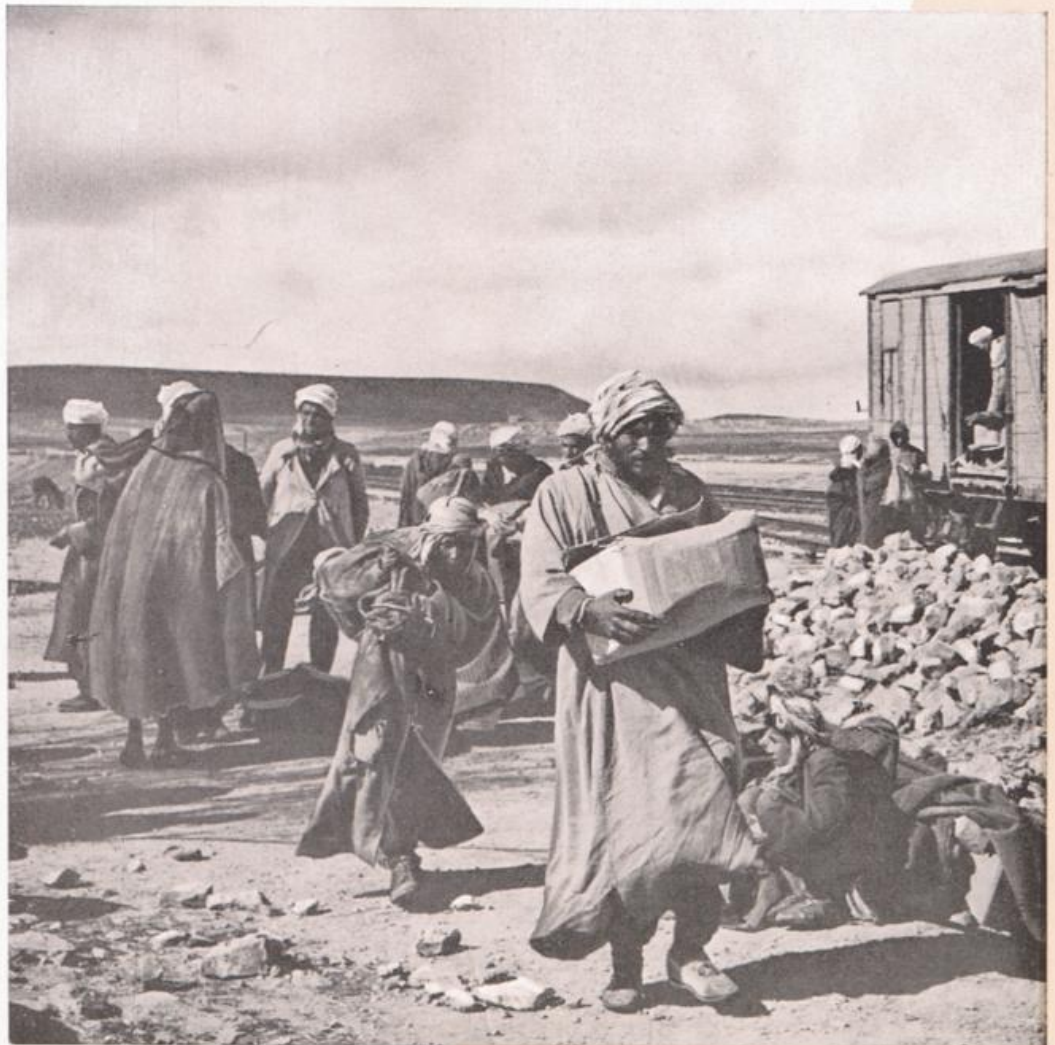
Assistance to victims of the events.
Value of relief supplies distributed:
Sw. fr. 4.5 million.



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Taken together, the gifts distributed in over sixty countries by the ICRC since the end of the Second World War represent a total value of approximately Sw. fr. 312 million and weigh 117,000 tons.

The ICRC has given assistance to war-disabled in thirty-seven countries.



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THE I.C.R.C. HAS THE CONFIDENCE OF THE SIGNATORIES OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

By its very mission, the ICRC has acted as a pioneer in the humanitarian field. Often of its own accord, it has proposed practical solutions to the problems of assistance and protection which have been raised by wars, and these solutions have often shown immediate effects. Its action has opened the way of humanitarian law for the States and has given them the means to protect the victims of war.

The Geneva Conventions embody the experience acquired by the ICRC during past conflicts. They form the basis in international law for action by the ICRC. In addition, the Conventions recognize the right of the ICRC to undertake any humanitarian initiative consistent with its traditions and with the Red Cross principles. It is therefore its duty to defend, in all circumstances, the spirit which inspires the Geneva Conventions.