

NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

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

France

National Days of Commemoration of the Centenary of the French Red Cross took place in Paris on May 24, 25 and 26, 1963.

They started with an inaugural meeting at the Palais de Chaillot, presided over by General de Gaulle.¹ The President of the French Republic delivered the following address :

It is man's destiny that his life should be a struggle, that it should contain both good and evil, and that pity, generosity, mutual aid should be accompanied by suffering.

The beneficent Red Cross thus had its origin in war. But, that this institution has been able, over a hundred years, to become widespread and has acquired that efficiency which is the admiration of contemporaries, it was not sufficient that the sad lack of care given to the wounded on the battlefields of Italy aroused feelings of pity, especially in the heart of the Emperor Napoleon III, nor was it sufficient that Henry Dunant took the initiative and carried out a campaign which induced no less than twelve governments to conclude, in 1863 and 1864, the first Geneva Convention, thereby instituting on behalf of the military victims of combats an international set of rules and obligations. Even in 1949, after the odious abuses of force perpetrated during the Second World War by the totalitarian dictatorship well known to us, when an additional Convention was to cover combatants without uniforms, hostages and deportees with codified protection, it was still necessary that one and only one organisation should be created to ensure respect for the Convention, that it should possess sufficient capacity, impartiality and prestige to be able to act, in spite of the pretensions of conflicting passions and of the torments of war, and that it should find in the consciences of peoples and of their leaders the consent and help which have enabled it to endure.

The International Committee of the Red Cross over the past hundred years has accomplished and continues to accomplish an incomparable task. Today, I address to it, whose President is with us in person, the greetings and recognition of the French Republic.

¹ Plate.

The purposes and the object of the French Red Cross are purely and simply humane and know no frontier. The Red Cross everywhere draws its life and its resources from national realities. In this way it resembles all other international organisations, including those which are now constructing a common edifice for their economy, their culture and their defence.

If, in France, the Red Cross has been able to establish itself, to act and to develop, it is because it is the French Red Cross.

As such, what magnificent work has it not accomplished ! Who can ignore what was done by the personnel of the Red Cross, and above all by its nurses, alongside the Medical Service, during the wars of 1870-1871, 1914-1918 and 1939-1945?

Has anyone the right to forget all the efforts, the pain and the suffering undergone by those men and women throughout the campaigns overseas ? Who could fail to appreciate the help which it always brought to so many sick, victims of disaster, prisoners, refugees ?

Mr. President, having heard the noble and masterly words with which you summed up all the success of the French Red Cross, I express to it, to its leaders and its personnel, nurses, ambulance drivers, assistants and first aid workers, the country's profound gratitude.

May the International Red Cross continue its work, the humanest work of all. May it tomorrow, as in the past, be able to count on France. Let the French Red Cross preserve untarnished and in the highest sense the reason for its existence, which consists of coming to the aid in time of peril of all who are suffering, and its sign which is above all private interests in the best possible way and on the highest national standard.

Previously, Mr. A. François-Poncet, President of the French Red Cross, had painted a striking picture of " A hundred years of the French Red Cross ". He started by affirming the gratitude felt by the French Red Cross for its Honorary President, General de Gaulle. He greeted the presence of Mr. Boissier, President of the ICRC, and of Mr. Beer, Secretary-General of the League, as well as of the representatives of several National Red Cross Societies. He recalled the origins of the Red Cross, the foundation of the ICRC and its activity over a century. He then spoke of the work ceaselessly expanding of the National Society of which he is President. He mentioned the efforts which have been made in so many directions with such efficiency, and concluded as follows :

That was a summary of the work of the French Red Cross, of its 1,200 local committees, its 90 departmental councils and its 40 members of the Administrative Council.

I hope this brief sketch will have shown you that the French Red Cross is by no means at the end of its course and that it is far from considering its task as being accomplished. It is in no way enclosed by habits, nor is it a prisoner of routine. It is not an administration. It is a movement, a band of people on the march, eager for change, keen to adapt itself, to renew itself unceasingly in order to face the ever-changing requirements of life. It is without doubt proud of the past which I have described in outline, and also of the present which testifies to the importance of its work. It is however turned towards the future. Its ardour is as fervent as it was at the outset. After I have finished speaking you will hear words by eminent figures explaining how this future will take shape and what will be the intellectual, moral and social aspect of the man of tomorrow, what is expected of us and, consequently, in what direction our zeal should lead us.

It would seem that as from now we should be bound by one lesson.

We are living in an age in which science extends its sway over matters to an astonishing degree. Discoveries follow each other in quick succession and the greatest inventiveness is used in new methods of destruction, more complete and on an ever more massive scale against the human race. For science is implacable, neglecting individuals, without pity and its laws are brazen. It could happen that our society could reach a very high material level with a corresponding decline in moral standards. We must guard ourselves against such a peril. This is what Bergson meant when he said that the world today, and, even more, that of tomorrow have need of additional spirituality!

There is nothing in fact of lasting endurance which does not come from the heart. Now, the heart's realm is that of the Red Cross.

In his work on Solferino, Henry Dunant addressed those he called "noble and compassionate hearts, chivalrous characters". It is from amongst these that the servants of the Red Cross are recruited. That institution, as others which are moreover similar to it, would thus appear to be a sort of salutary counter-weight to the harshness of the century.

Come then towards it. Give it your help and your love, until the day when men will realise that the secret of happiness lies not in fighting, in hatred, in fanaticism, but in toleration, understanding, in brotherhood and peace!"

Then Mr. Louis Armand and Mr. Jean Bernard successively dealt with the following subjects: "The Red Cross and the world of tomorrow", and "Medicine of the future".

A meeting took place in the morning of May 25 presided over by the Minister of Health. The Directors of Civil Defence, the Army Medical Service as well as the Director-General of Public Health, and Mr. Cesbron, the writer, spoke on the subject "What

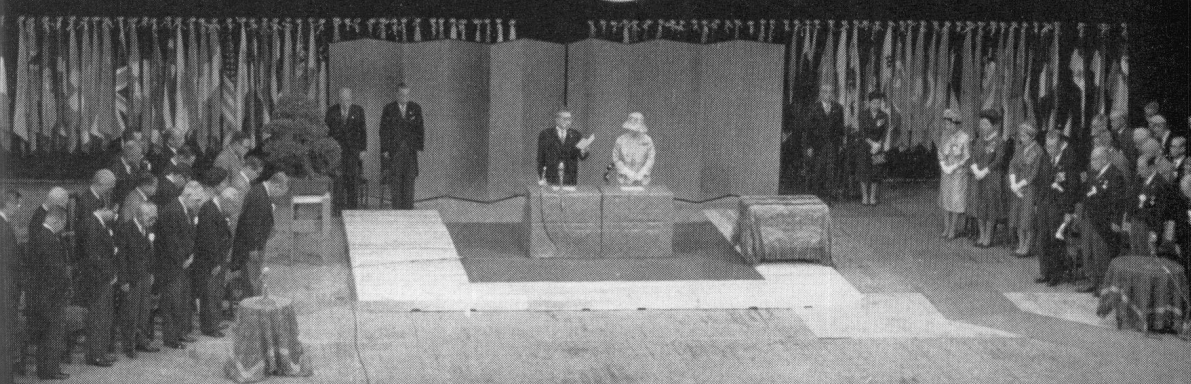


... from General De Gaulle, President of France (on his left, Mr. François-Poncet, President of the French Red Cross; on his right, Mr. Marcellin, Minister of Public Health and Population; behind him, Mr. Boissier, President of the ICRC, and Mr. Beer, Secretary-General of the League).

TRIBUTE TO THE RED CROSS ON ITS CENTENARY

... from His Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

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France expects of the French Red Cross". In conclusion, Mr. François-Poncet stressed the importance of the Red Cross Centenary and analysed the lesson to be drawn from Henry Dunant's fine example.

On the same day the inauguration took place in Paris of the "Henry Dunant cross-roads" and on Sunday a national competition of first-aid, exercises and a parade of the various Red Cross services gave immediate practical demonstration of the efficiency and vitality of the National Society, to which the ICRC was pleased to bring its congratulations and good wishes.

Japan

The Japanese Red Cross celebrated the Centenary of the Red Cross with an impressive ceremony which took place on May 8, 1963, in Tokyo, and at which Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress of Japan were present. A number of leading personalities also attended, of whom mention should be made of the Imperial Princesses and the Prime Minister of Japan, together with senior officials.

The Japanese Red Cross was represented by its President, Prince Shimadzu, its Vice-Presidents, Mr. Ishizaka and Mr. Tanabe, and the heads of various departments.

H.M. The Emperor read out a message whose text was as follows : ¹

It is Our pleasure to be here and meet all of you at this significant gathering to celebrate the Red Cross Centenary.

We are very glad that, for the past one hundred years since the establishment of the Resolutions of the Geneva International Conference, Red Cross Societies have been born in 90 countries and have made such a progress through the co-operation of people of every country in the world.

¹ *Plate.*