

## CENTENARY OF THE RED CROSS OF YUGOSLAVIA

In 1875, at Cetinje, then the capital of Montenegro, a committee was set up to provide relief for refugees from Herzegovina. And that was the origin of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia. To celebrate the centenary of that event, delegates from National Societies and international institutions of the Red Cross who attended the World Red Cross Conference on Peace, in Belgrade, in June 1975, were asked to participate in a formal ceremony held in the town of Cetinje.

Dr. Nikola Georgievski, President of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia, was the first to address the gathering. He spoke about the Society's history and its remarkable development during the past century: membership is five million or about 20 per cent of the country's population. He described some of the Society's varied and effective activities: health training, disease detection, first-aid, first-aid courses which over the past ten years had been attended by more than two and a half million persons, blood donor service, home care, social welfare and international aid.

Referring to the origin of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia, Mr. Georgievski said: "The idea of founding a humanitarian organization, which was dictated by need, germinated in our soil long before the first Red Cross organization was founded. We find it in individual examples among our people everywhere. We find it at the beginning of the 19th century, at the time of the plague which ravaged Europe and did not spare this small free country, Montenegro. For instance, in his plea to the Austrian governor of Dalmatia, the sovereign of Montenegro, Peter I Petrović, asked for medical personnel in the following terms: "I ask you not as a brother, for we are not brothers, but as a man, for we must hold out a helping hand in time of need."

Mr. Georgievski concluded: "During its long existence and in its activities, the Red Cross has overcome many ordeals and fulfilled the wishes of those in need of aid. In the world of tomorrow, the noble and humanitarian ideas of the Red Cross will for that very reason become the aims and the ideals of an ever-growing number of men.

We must therefore orient our action and our efforts with a view to ensuring a lasting peace that will guarantee a better and finer future for mankind.”

Mr. Eric Martin, President of the ICRC, delivered an address. A few passages are given below:

*On the occasion of this great anniversary, I am happy indeed to bring the congratulations of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the Yugoslav Red Cross for its centenary, together with best wishes for the future.*

*You have chosen to celebrate this centenary at the very birthplace of your Society, in the Republic of Montenegro, a symbol of independence. It was right here, one hundred years ago, confronted by an influx of refugees and wounded persons, fleeing from nearby regions where tragic events were taking place, that men of good will decided not only to give relief to these victims, in accord with the principles of our movement, but to give added force to their action by appealing to international solidarity and, to that effect, to apply for membership in the Red Cross family, then entering its second decade.*

*The historic events which inspired the foundation of your Society also correspond to an important date for the International Committee. They led to the statement of a point in Red Cross doctrine which is now universally accepted: even if hostilities which produce victims are internal and not international in character, the Red Cross cannot remain indifferent to the suffering they cause and must come to the victims' assistance, faithful to its fundamental rule—to consider only the person who suffers, whatever the causes of his suffering.*

*The ICRC was not only pleased at that time to introduce the newly established Society to all of the sister Societies, but also, a few months later, to send a medical mission to Cetinje. It was wintertime and the journey which took us only one hour today took four days for the doctors. It was worth it. The three envoys from Geneva arrived and established the first contact with the Montenegrin Society. They received a warm welcome, typical of the hospitality of your country, and found a complete understanding of the objectives of our movement. Ever since that time, the bonds between your Society and the ICRC have grown steadily stronger, so that the institution which I represent can truly rejoice at the progress of your great organization...*

*...The Red Cross of Yugoslavia has also played a full part in the international life of the Red Cross. It has often made important contributions to relief activities undertaken by the ICRC, many times in co-operation*

*with the League, in the course of armed conflicts. We cannot forget the Yugoslav doctor, on mission for the ICRC, who gave his life while serving under the flag of the Red Cross.*

*While your Society has consistently worked to develop by every means its peacetime activities, it has also, with outstanding vigour—due indeed to the dramatic history of this country—demonstrated its interest in activities which are especially dear to the heart of the International Committee: the diffusion of the Geneva Conventions, the development of humanitarian law, and, naturally, the contribution of the Red Cross to peace.*

Mr. Henrik Beer conveyed the congratulations and good wishes of the League, of which he is Secretary General, and read out a message from Mr. José Barroso, Chairman of the Board of Governors. He spoke of the vast sphere of Red Cross action and of the multiplicity and value of the services which the Red Cross of Yugoslavia renders the individual and the community, both at home and in other lands.

At the close of the ceremony, and with traditional Yugoslav hospitality, the participants were invited to an open-air lunch enlivened by folk-dancing.