

First Red Cross Meeting in the South-West Region of the Indian Ocean

Leaders of the Red Cross Societies of Madagascar and Mauritius, of the French Red Cross in Réunion, of the Seychelles Red Cross Committee and of the Comoros Red Crescent Committee met for the first time, from 14 to 18 May 1984, at Saint-Denis de la Réunion. The French Red Cross was represented by Mr. M. Bocquet, Vice-President of the French National Red Cross, and Miss E. Bourel, National Director for the departmental branches; the League had delegated Mr. Cassaigneau, head of the "West and Central Africa" desk in Geneva, who was accompanied by Mr. E. Ekué, programme officer, and Mr. R. Carrillo, disaster preparedness programme officer; the ICRC had dispatched Mrs. J. Egger, head of the co-operation service, and Mr. L. Isler, of the ICRC regional delegation at Nairobi, also took part in the meeting.

The idea to hold this meeting had been put forward by the French Red Cross, which was anxious to encourage regional co-operation in the event of national disasters in this area of the Indian Ocean. In response to this proposal, the leaders of the Societies gathered at Réunion adopted a number of conclusions, in which "conscious of their responsibilities and wishing to further the ideals and fundamental principles of the Red Cross, they asserted their determination to continue exchanges of views, in order to strengthen regional co-operation in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding, and they expressed the wish to hold meetings periodically in future".

The Red Cross leaders adopted a regional co-operation plan, subject to financial resources made available, with the following aims: to set up a disaster preparedness council to cope with the cyclones sweeping every year across that area; to study the creation at Réunion of a regional relief supply centre that would form part of the League's regional supply centres network; to provide every Red Cross and Red Crescent Society and committee with telex and radiocommunication

services; to arrange a regional seminar on the organization of national, regional and international Red Cross relief action in the event of natural disasters. Furthermore, consideration was given to the preparation of a regional gathering of young people belonging to Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and of bilateral exchanges between the Societies of that region in the spheres of information, education and health.

The meeting that took place in May answered a need. It gave an opportunity to the Societies and committees present to realize the solidarity drawing them together, by the fact of their being members of the same region and of an international movement.

At this meeting, the ICRC and League played an active role that was much appreciated. The ICRC President sent a message, which was read out at the opening session to the participants and to a large number of eminent guests, both civilian and military. The ICRC representatives then addressed the meeting on several subjects: the ICRC, its role, its organization, its activities in Africa, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, and the dissemination of knowledge of those principles and of international humanitarian law. The listeners expressed their interest and desire to work in active co-operation with the Red Cross institutions in Geneva.

