

NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

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Netherlands

We wish to thank the Netherlands Red Cross for having sent us the following interesting item of information :

The Netherlands Government, whose duty it is to establish in time of war or occupation an official Information Bureau, as laid down by the Geneva Conventions, has requested the Netherlands Red Cross to undertake not only the organization of this Bureau, but also to take the necessary steps for its functioning from now on. The Netherlands Red Cross has been pleased to take on this task since it regards it as a proof of recognition by the Government, of the importance of the Information Bureau which has been in existence for a long time.

The Government's decision has however brought about the winding up of the present Bureau and, as a result of further discussions with the authorities concerned, has led to the preparation of an entirely new programme. The Government has agreed to subsidize the Red Cross Society for three years, from May 15, 1959, to enable it to carry out training and to give instruction to the liaison personnel in all local sections.

Two sections have now been established under the charge of the director of the former Information Bureau : a military section, whose task it will be to ensure the implementation of Articles 16 and 17 of the First Convention, Articles 19 and 20 of the Second Convention, and Article 122 of the Third Convention, and a civilian section, dealing with the implementation of Articles 130, 136, 137, 138 and 139 of the Fourth Convention. The director will himself

control general affairs and will also be in charge of yet another civilian section dealing with civilian messages and the reuniting of dispersed families (Articles 15 and 26 of the Fourth Convention).

The two heads of the Bureau, who are already carrying out their duties, are at present giving instruction locally to the directing staff and keeping at the same time in touch with the departmental authorities.

Local sections, of which there are 345, have been asked to nominate, with complete freedom of choice, a person, whether a member or not of that section's bureau, who would be prepared to take over responsibility for the official Bureau in the event of war. Of these, 240 have already designated their local informants. These liaison agents come from a variety of backgrounds: employees, civil servants, lawyers, mothers of families, teachers, etc.

We certainly hope that the Information Bureau will never need to come into operation. It is however generally realized that preparations must be made for all eventualities.

Each member of the liaison personnel receives a copy of the four Geneva Conventions, in Dutch, which we believe in itself to be a contribution towards disseminating these legal texts. Although we cannot possibly expect a profound study of these to be made, some of this personnel has already expressed its satisfaction at being able to familiarize itself with the broad outlines of these Conventions.

The official Information Bureau will only concern itself with the tasks which are laid down by the Conventions : in other words, requests for information, for example, about a natural disaster (floods, earthquakes, etc.) would be dealt with by another section which it might be necessary to designate.

In order to ensure satisfactory co-operation with the military and civilian authorities which will have to supply the information mentioned in the Conventions, we have submitted questionnaires to the military department and to the Ministry of the Interior, on measures which have already been taken concerning the implementation of articles relating to the activities of the official Bureau.

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The Netherlands Red Cross also normally receives the most varied requests for information, which are studied and dealt with by the "Section for foreign relations". Between the present Information Bureau, which is being wound up and this section, there is moreover a clear-cut division in responsibilities : the former dealing with supplying information about large groups of persons (Hungarian refugees, Indonesian repatriates, etc.) and the Section for external affairs concerning itself with all individual cases ; for these it has adopted the principle of never revealing an address without first obtaining the permission of the person who is being traced. In such cases, we always ask our local section to make contact with the person concerned and to inform him of the request which is being made. It goes without saying that the system of local informants to the official Bureau which is at present being set up, has been useful to us in such cases in spite of the fact that these activities are not part of their duties.

Panama

In one of the recent numbers of its bulletin, *Revista de la Cruz Roja Nacional de Panama*, the Panamanian Red Cross sets out, in an article entitled "Activities of the National Red Cross", a summary of its activities which it divides in two halves : permanent activities and special activities. With regard to the former, we would point out the services undertaken in three clinics : ante-natal, pre-school and dental, in two homes for foundling children, one of which is at the headquarters of the Red Cross and the other being in the country, and finally in four different children's day nurseries set up in various parts of the capital.

Amongst the permanent services, one can also mention the distribution of meals to needy families, an activity which has just