

## PHILIPPINES

This article relates one of the more recent activities of the Philippine National Red Cross<sup>1</sup> which has an on-going relief programme for the country's cultural minorities.<sup>2</sup> These groups of people live in primeval forests and mountainous regions, in almost total destitution. They are seldom visited by relief agencies, and they depend on root crops and whatever food supply they can eke out from nature.

The Red Cross launched its assistance programme in 1973. Since then it has brought help to some 10,146 families, or 48,635 persons, throughout the country.

Red Cross assists the minority groups in various ways, including family health training and sanitation. Natives are taught how to clean their yards, plant vegetables and flowers and how to make fences. They are also encouraged to build their own washrooms.

In Sawang Zambales, the Red Cross distributed foodstuffs, medicine, soap and other household items to every family, and medical teams were brought in to treat tribe members suffering from skin ailments and other common diseases.

In the province of Pangasinan, the local chapter of the Philippine National Red Cross is engaged in one of the most extensive operations to help the less fortunate people. A group of volunteers from the division of public schools and from the provincial government is assisting the Red Cross teams. Together they went to great lengths to reach the distant areas where the minority groups have their homes, in the mountains around San Nicolas, Sual and Labrado.

---

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *Contact*, published by the ICRC and the League, October 1974.

<sup>2</sup> *Plate*.

The relief teams followed uncharted trails to reach their destination. Oftentimes, they had to hike long distances under scorching sun.

Frequently the group had to forge through dangerous terrain, ford streams and cross suspended bridges made of wild vines.

*Red Cross is partner with Government*

The Red Cross is not alone, though, in trying to ameliorate the living conditions of the destitute minorities.

The Philippine Government seeks to spread the blessings of civilization to all of the nation's population, and the Red Cross is a welcome partner in this work.

In Bulacan, the Red Cross co-operated closely with the Government in launching "Operation Gusad", a beautification project which stressed the importance of cleanliness to one's health and to one's environment.

Project workers taught the procedure of good grooming and how to keep oneself free from skin diseases and other physical discomfort.

A similar project, "Operation Roads and Trails", emphasized the importance of building roads and trails from outlying habitats to the nearest village.

The education of the minority groups is also a major concern of the Government and the Red Cross. Hand in hand, they worked to establish a "Multi-purpose Centre" where the minorities can learn how to read and write, and increase their knowledge about life and the outside world.