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Winter in Hungary and the relief action of the International Committee of the Red Cross

As is known, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been entrusted with carrying out in Hungary itself the great effort of international solidarity which events have called forth. It has to bear the considerable cost incurred in the transport of commodities and the supervision of the distribution of relief supplies by the Hungarian Red Cross, in accordance with the agreement signed by the Hungarian Government.

So far the greater part of the relief supplies distributed has been given by National Red Cross Societies, but several governmental and non-governmental organisations have also contributed to this charitable work.

Nevertheless, although enormous resources have been placed at the International Committee's disposal, it has only been possible to assist the most needy victims. In Budapest where the situation is by far the most serious, the lack of coal and milk in particular affects the general public, especially children and old people. For that reason the International Committee's first concern has been to supply fuel for hospitals and milk for infants. However, the daily ration of about 1 litre of milk supplied to 173,000 children under three years of age in the Hungarian capital represents some 600 tons of powdered milk per month, and about 9,000 tons of coal are required to heat hospitals only over the same period.

The ICRC is also arranging for school-children in the most damaged parts of Budapest to be given one hot meal daily. Since December 9, 50,000 children have been receiving this daily meal, and by about January 15 some 150,000 school-children will benefit. Moreover, since December 18, 100,000 needy persons have been given an additional ration equal to a food value of 800 to 1,000 calories per day. The ICRC has already supplied 25,000 woollen blankets to hospital patients and the homeless, and is now preparing the distribution of another 200,000, but what are these figures against a background of 2,000,000 people living in a capital where broken windows and the lack of fuel make every dwelling cold? With the winter just begun, one cannot view without anxiety the huge task of international aid which still remains to be undertaken in Budapest.

At a time when New Year wishes are usually being exchanged, the ICRC wishes to call attention to the need for continuing and intensifying its action in Hungary, while expressing its warmest thanks to the Red Cross movement and all those who have already enabled it to alleviate the suffering of those in the greatest distress.

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