

CONFIDENTIAL FILING

Prime Minister's meeting with  
Mr. Somnang, President of the  
International Committee of the Red Cross.  
7th February 1991.

PRIME MINISTER

August 1990

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>11-10-90</del>							
7.2.91							
PREM 19/3489							

MEETING  
RECORD  
CC MASTER

CONFIDENTIAL



TLO  
EM

CC PC

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Private Secretary*

7 February 1991

*See below.*

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The Prime Minister had a talk this afternoon with Dr. Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Dr. Sommaruga was accompanied by two members of his staff.

Dr. Sommaruga began by expressing his sympathy for those who were suffering as a result of the Gulf conflict and his feeling of frustration that the ICRC was prevented from doing as much as he would like to help our prisoners of war. The Prime Minister said that we were indeed very concerned about the POWs. There had been a huge weight of public revulsion at the treatment and parading of the POWs. We were disappointed at the ICRC's lack of success so far in securing access to the prisoners. He would like to hear more from Dr. Sommaruga about what the ICRC had actually done so far and intended to do in future.

Dr. Sommaruga said he would first express his appreciation of the way in which the United Kingdom had treated the Iraqis who were here. We had behaved in perfect conformity with the Geneva Conventions. He wished that all members of the international coalition were as diligent in fulfilling their obligations. In response to a question from the Prime Minister, he cited the example of Italy as a country which was not. Dr. Sommaruga continued that on 17 January the ICRC had reminded all parties to the conflict of their obligations under the Geneva Convention. As soon as they heard that prisoners had been taken, they had requested notification of the details in writing. They had subsequently reminded the Iraqis that public display of POWs was not allowed. They had also sent an additional communication of protest. The Prime Minister asked whether these representations had been public or private. Dr. Sommaruga said they had been private but very firm. Public protest was not the ICRC style. They could only act with the co-operation of the parties and had to keep channels open. Britain could help by showing that it had confidence in the ICRC, and by asking other parties to the Convention to make representations to the Iraqis. He had in mind Jordan, Iran, even the PLO.

EM

Dr. Sommaruga continued that he was optimistic about the prospects and thought the ICRC would eventually be able to secure access to our POWs, although not immediately. The ICRC had been dealing with the Iraqis for 10 years. They were using a number of different channels, in particular through Amman. He had also written personally to Saddam Hussein (a fact which he would not want to be made public). The Prime Minister asked whether it was the case that despite all this, the ICRC had no evidence of how many POWs there were, where they were and what their condition was. Dr. Sommaruga confirmed there had been no response on these points. The Prime Minister asked whether all of these representations had been followed up. Dr Sommaruga said they had been. The Prime Minister asked what channel of communication had been used when it came to sending an ICRC medical mission to Iraq. Dr Sommaruga said that had been the ICRC's own decision. All they needed was visas, which they had obtained through the Embassy in Tehran. The mission had not been sent in response to an Iraqi request.

The Prime Minister said he assumed that the ICRC had faced similar problems before. Dr Sommaruga confirmed this, saying the only way to deal with this sort of situation was by discreet pressure and not too much noise or public condemnation. The Prime Minister questioned whether it would not be better to go in for some condemnation. If the ICRC got nowhere by being courteous and polite, they might have to try other methods. Dr Sommaruga said it was very important they should not be seen as an instrument of the coalition. That would be counter-productive for our PoWs. The over-riding aim must be to get access to them. He could assure the Prime Minister that the ICRC were very firm in private, so firm that the Iraqi Ambassador in Geneva refused to see him any more. He could well understand the feelings of dissatisfaction in the United Kingdom about lack of progress and the desire to see results. But he urged the Prime Minister not to lose confidence in the ICRC.

The Prime Minister said we would certainly not lose confidence. At the same time there was some irritation at the ICRC's tendency to equate the Allies' behaviour with that of Iraq. But he did not want to dwell on that. The question which interested him was what more could be done to get access to our prisoners. Surely as a minimum the ICRC could say openly that the Iraqis had refused access while the Allies had granted it? Dr Sommaruga said he would certainly acknowledge publicly that Iraq was acting in contravention of the Geneva Conventions. But to return to the point about equating Iraqis and the Allies: if he officially and publicly condemned one side, circumstances might arise in which he would have to do the same to the other, for instance over civilian casualties. The Prime Minister said that there was a clear distinction between civilian casualties caused unwittingly while attacking military targets, and the Iraqi practice of firing missiles at population centres. But he did not want to labour the point. His main concern was with access to the PoWs. He would ask Dr Sommaruga to keep him up to date regularly on his efforts. Dr Sommaruga said that he would do this.

Dr Sommaruga added that he was most appreciative of the additional financial contribution to the ICRC which the United

Kingdom had just announced. He expressed the hope that we would also soon be able to ratify the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The Prime Minister had written to him about this as Foreign Secretary 1989. The Prime Minister said that they were on hold for now, but we had not forgotten them. Dr Sommaruga said he also wanted to thank the United Kingdom for the practical support which the ICRC received for its operations around the world. The Prime Minister said this would be maintained.

Finally, Dr Sommaruga mentioned briefly the problems faced by the ICRC in the Occupied Territories.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence), John Neilson (Department of Energy), Suma Chakrabarti (Overseas Development Administration) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,  
Charles Powell*

CHARLES POWELL

R H T Gozney Esq  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
RED CROSS

You are to see Dr. Sommaruga, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, tomorrow.

TEMPORARILY  
RETAINED

S. Gray

11/3/2017

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

There is a full note by the Foreign Office in the folder which covers all the issues likely to come up. Our main quarrel with him is his seeming inability to recognise that one side in the Gulf conflict is in gross violation of its obligations under the Geneva Conventions, while the other is not. This does not go down well. At the same time, the ICRC was slow off the mark last summer in dealing with the problem of refugees from Kuwait. On the basis of their record, it is difficult to have confidence in their persistence in demanding access from the Iraqis to our POWs.

Against this background, the main points to raise are:

- Iraq's appalling treatment of Allied airmen, their threat to use the POWs as a human shield, and their failure to notify the ICRC of the capture and whereabouts of POWs. You will want to press for an account of exactly what the ICRC are doing already to correct this: what more can be done: and how we and others can help.
- in this context, you could make the point that the Iraqis should not be allowed to pick and choose. They have agreed to let the ICRC send a medical mission to look after civilian casualties in Iraq, and another to assess the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. They are happy to

CONFIDENTIAL

use the ICRC to help over their prisoner exchange with Iran. If the ICRC are doing all this, they ought to insist on access to our POWs.

- you will also want to make the point that statements equating Iraq's behaviour with that of the Allies do not go down well, and he ought to avoid them.
- he may make comments about the conditions of Iraqi civilian detainees held here. You can say that we are complying scrupulously with our obligations. We are making arrangements for families and dependants to receive benefits and income support. But any recommendations which the ICRC make will be followed up. This is one more reason why we must insist that the ICRC try even harder to get the Iraqis to live up to their obligations in even the most elementary way.

There are additional points about Northern Ireland, wider ICRC operations in the Third World, and Ratification of the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. But I suggest you leave these for your colleagues and focus the whole attention of your meeting with him on the Gulf.

CDP

CDP

6 February 1991

jd c:\wpdocs\foreign\icrc



cc B'up

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

CONFIDENTIAL

6 February 1991

Dear Charles,

Prime Minister's Meeting with President  
of the International Committee of the Red Cross:  
7 February

The Prime Minister has agreed to a brief meeting at 1715 on 7 February with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Dr Cornelio Sommaruga. Dr Sommaruga will already have called on the Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Northern Ireland Secretary and the Minister for Overseas Development. A biographical note is enclosed.

The ICRC is an international humanitarian body staffed entirely by Swiss nationals with particular responsibility as guardians of the 1949 Geneva Conventions - including the Third on the treatment of POWs and the Fourth on treatment of civilians in times of hostilities. The ICRC are independent and impartial.

The ICRC are using some two thirds of their operational resources for the Gulf crisis. There are no assessed contributions: appeals are launched for each emergency. The Gulf appeal is for S.Fr 141m of which S.Fr 60m has been raised so far. The FCO is announcing an initial contribution of £2.5 million (S.Fr 6.2 million) drawn on the contingency reserve.

The main focus of Dr Sommaruga's visit will inevitably be the ICRC's role in the Gulf. His agenda will include support for the ICRC's operations, concern about civilian casualties, allied treatment of Iraqi POWs and civilian detainees (including TV footage of the former) and ratification of the Additional Protocols. There will be strong media interest, particularly in the light of Dr Sommaruga's statement of 1 February calling on all sides to respect the basic laws of war (a summary is enclosed) in terms that place the allies on a par with the Iraqis.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

The Prime Minister will wish to express his deep concern and the public horror at Saddam Hussein's parading and interrogation of the allied airmen on Iraqi television, at Iraqi reports that POWs are being used as a human shield, have been wounded and one killed in allied bombing, all in clear breach of the Third Geneva Convention. So far, Iraq has neither notified the ICRC of the capture or whereabouts of the airmen nor permitted any ICRC access. The Prime Minister may want to ask what else the ICRC can do to resolve this problem, which is of very great importance to us.

In commenting on Dr Sommaruga's statement of 1 February, the Prime Minister will also wish to rebut any suggestion that our war aims go beyond the terms of Security Council Resolution 678 or that allied behaviour is on a par with Iraq. Unlike Iraq's systematic destruction of Kuwait and use of terror weapons against civilians, we are attacking only those targets in Iraq which contribute to Iraqi operations and the occupation of Kuwait and have set ourselves the aim of keeping civilian targets deliberately to a minimum.

The Foreign Secretary (who will have seen Dr Sommaruga immediately before the call on the Prime Minister) will discuss the ICRC's wider humanitarian role in the Gulf. He will welcome the ICRC's wish to have the earliest possible access to Kuwait after its liberation, not only to look after the Kuwaiti people, but also to protect the 100,000 Palestinians from possible revenge attacks. The ICRC have medical teams on standby and also teams of sanitation engineers and electrical experts to help restore facilities and prevent disease in Kuwait.

The ICRC have just sent a medical mission to Iraq to look after civilian casualties. The Iraqis have hitherto refused to allow in such an ICRC mission, and their acceptance of the request is no doubt with an eye to propaganda advantage. If the ICRC have evidence of widespread civilian casualties, they will refer to it, given their wish to be seen to be even handed between combatants and their aim to ensure compliance with the laws of war by all sides. But they are unlikely to be impressed by any Iraqi attempts to manufacture evidence. The ICRC will also conduct an assessment of the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people for imported food

/supplies.

CONFIDENTIAL





CONFIDENTIAL

supplies. If they find a need exists, we will need to consider whether to object. If challenged about the conditions of Iraqi civilian detainees held under the Immigration Act (the ICRC have just sent the report of their January inspection visit to us and to Iraq), the Prime Minister can stress that our policy is in scrupulous compliance with our obligations under the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions and we will see that any recommendations for improvement are followed up. The ICRC inspection team expressed some concern about the situation of the families of Iraqi civilian detainees and POWs who had been left in difficult circumstances. Arrangements have been made to ensure that families receive benefits and income support. The British Red Cross Society is acting as a link between the families on the one hand and the Probation Service, the DSS and the MOD on the other.

Iraqi civilians were originally detained under the Immigration Act pending deportation on grounds of national security. At the outset of hostilities they became protected persons under the Geneva Conventions. A number have appealed against deportation and their cases are being considered. Those with military rank are held as prisoners of war and a tribunal will adjudicate any dispute over their status as such.

Dr Sommaruga may press for an early commitment to ratify the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. We have put the issue on hold until the Gulf crisis is over. The Protocols raise complex legal issues including the protection given to civilians and the environment in war time; there has been protracted consultation within Whitehall and with our NATO allies.

An ICRC delegation began visiting prisons in Northern Ireland in 1958 in a limited capacity. Following the 1981 Maze hunger strike, the ICRC were allowed to visit sentenced and remand prisoners throughout the province. Since June 1987, the ICRC have been pressing for acceptance in principle of the proposal that the ICRC visit prisons every year, with 4 to 5 delegates spending up to a month at a time in Northern Ireland to conduct a detailed visit of each establishment. In January 1990, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland agreed to full scale visits on a three yearly basis with follow up visits of eight to

/ten

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

ten days in the intervening years. The next full scheduled visit will be in June 1991 when the ICRC will be presenting new proposals to change the format. If Dr Sommaruga raises the subject, the Prime Minister might wish to say that while we appreciate the ICRC's dissatisfaction with the short visits, we nonetheless feel that the existing arrangement offers generous opportunities to see the Northern Ireland prisoners and that we are not prepared to consider substantial changes to the present arrangement.

Mrs Chalker will review the ICRC's humanitarian and relief operations in the Third World with Dr Sommaruga. Growing demands for more assistance to refugee programmes in the Third World are placing a considerable financial strain on the ICRC; the main programmes are in Africa, Pakistan/Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The ODA's annual contribution in 1990 was £5.1 million; it is planned at least to match the figure in 1991. With other relief agencies the ICRC mounted a swift and effective operation in Jordan last autumn to meet the exodus of 850,000 refugees from Iraq and Jordan.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence), Tony Pawson (Northern Ireland Office), and Suma Chakrabarti (ODA).

(S L Gass)  
Private Secretary

Sir Charles Powell KCMG  
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL

## SOMMARUGA, DR CORNELIO

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since May 1987.

Born Rome 1932 of Swiss parents. Educated at the Universities of Zurich, Paris and Rome. Entered the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 1960 serving in Cologne, Bonn, The Hague and Rome. Head of the Swiss Delegation to EFTA, GATT, UNCTAD and the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva (1969-73). Deputy Secretary-General of EFTA, Geneva, 1973-76. Federal Office of External Economic Affairs in Berne with the rank of Ambassador, 1976-80. Federal Delegate on trade agreements 1980-84. State Secretary of External Economic Affairs 1984-87.

His appointment to ICRC caused some surprise, as he had not previously been associated with humanitarian questions, but he is tackling his responsibilities with enthusiasm. Has tightened his grip on operational activities but may have been guilty of impetuous judgement and over-assertion of ICRC's international role during the 1988 Ethiopian famine relief operation with consequences for his own standing with ICRC staff. Since then he has been more cautious but still over-domineering. Visited London June 1987.

Dr Sommaruga is married with six children.

He speaks good English. His wife speaks only French and Italian.

TEMPORARILY  
RETAINED  
J. Gray  
11/3/2017

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

UNCLASSIFIED  
FM UKMIS GENEVA  
TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELNO 75

**ADVANCE COPY**

OF 011120Z FEBRUARY 91

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK, CABINET OFFICE, ODA, JHQ HIGH WYCOMBE  
INFO IMMEDIATE HQBFME, RIYADH, EC POSTS, WASHINGTON, PARIS  
INFO IMMEDIATE UKMIS NEW YORK, AMMAN, TEHRAN, ANKARA, DAMASCUS  
INFO IMMEDIATE CAIRO

JHQ HIGH WYCOMBE FOR POLAD

GULF CRISIS : ICRC APPEAL TO BELLIGERENTS

1. ICRC PRESIDENT, SOMMARUGA, MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT THIS MORNING, CALLING ON ALL BELLIGERENTS TO HAVE DUE REGARD FOR HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS IN THE GULF WAR.

QUOTE - THE CONFLICT NOW RAGING IN THE MIDDLE EAST WILL INEVITABLY BRING WIDESPREAD DESTRUCTION, PERHAPS ON A SCALE UNPRECEDENTED IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. MILLIONS OF CIVILIANS HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UP IN THE VIOLENCE, WITHOUT SHELTER OR PROTECTION AGAINST OCCUPATION AND BOMBING. GROWING NUMBERS OF COMBATANTS ARE FALLING INTO ENEMY HANDS. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF GROUND TROOPS - MOST OF THEM YOUNG MEN - ARE PREPARING TO MEET IN A DEADLY CONFRONTATION. THE DETERMINATION OF THE PARTIES IN CONFLICT AND THE BUILD-UP OF AWESOME MEANS OF DESTRUCTION ARE IN PRESAGE OF IRREVERSIBLE DEVASTATION. WHEN THE VEIL OF CENSORSHIP IS LIFTED, THE FULL HORROR OF THE SUFFERING INFLICTED ON THE PEOPLES OF THE REGION AND ON COMBATANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES WILL BE REVEALED FOR ALL TO SEE.

ONE OF THE MOST DISQUIETING ASPECTS OF THIS CONFLICT IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE LAW OF WAR, WHICH IS THE EXPRESSION OF THE MOST BASIC AND UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES OF HUMANITY AND OF THE DICTATES OF THE PUBLIC CONSCIENCE, MIGHT BE SWEEP ASIDE BY THE POLITICAL, MILITARY OR PROPAGANDA DEMANDS OF THE MOMENT.

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE METHODS OR MEANS OF WARFARE IS NOT UNLIMITED. WEAPONS HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS AND THOSE LIKELY TO CAUSE DISPROPORTIONATE SUFFERING AND DAMAGE TO THE ENVIRONMENT ARE PROHIBITED.

THE WOUNDED, WHETHER CIVILIAN OR MILITARY, AND PRISONERS MUST RECEIVE SPECIAL CONSIDERATION AND PROTECTION IN COMPLIANCE WITH SPECIFIC RULES WHICH THE ENTIRE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS UNDERTAKEN TO RESPECT.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) THEREFORE SOLEMNLY APPEALS TODAY TO ALL BELLIGERENTS, IN THE NAME OF ALL CIVILIAN AND MILITARY VICTIMS, TO HAVE DUE REGARD FOR HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS. TO SHOW RESPECT FOR THE VICTIMS AND TREAT THEM HUMANELY, IN THE SPIRIT OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS, IS TO RECOGNISE A HERITAGE COMMON TO ALL MANKIND AND THUS PAVE THE WAY TO RECONCILIATION. IT IS ALSO THE LAST CHANCE OF AVERTING A TRAGEDY EVEN GREATER THAN THE USE OF FORCE. UNQUOTE

## COMMENT

2. THIS IS VINTAGE SOMMARUGA. AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT TO HIM AND HIS SENIOR COLLEAGUES, DECLARATIONS OF THIS KIND RISK SERIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING AMONG THE PUBLIC, SINCE THEY TAKE NO ACCOUNT OF THE FACT THAT ONE SIDE IN THE WAR IS IN GROSS VIOLATION OF ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS ETC, WHILE THE OTHER IS NOT.

3. WE HAVE TOLD SENIOR MEMBERS OF SOMMARUGA'S PARTY THAT, IN LONDON NEXT WEEK, HE WOULD DO WELL NOT TO PLAY DOWN IRAQI VIOLATIONS, AND TO RECOGNISE THAT THE ALLIES HAVE GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO LIMIT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN IRAQ/KUWAIT BY CONCENTRATING ON MILITARY TARGETS: AND HAVE FULFILLED ALL THEIR OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS IRAQI POWS.

MORLAND

YYYY

DISTRIBUTION

42

ADVANCE

42

IRAQ/KUWAIT  
PS 2  
PS/MR HOGG  
PS/MR LENNOX-BOYD  
PS/S OF S FOR DEFENCE  
PS/PUS  
MR FAIRWEATHER  
MR BROOMFIELD  
MR SLATER  
MR GORE-BOOTH  
MR GOULDEN  
MR JAY  
MR BERMAN (LEGAL ADVISERS)  
HD/MED  
HD/AMD  
HD/CONSULAR D  
HD/ECD(E)  
HD/NAD  
HD/NEWS D  
HD/NENAD  
HD/SECPOL D

HD/SED  
HD/UND 2  
CHIEF OF ASSESSMENT STAFF  
MR PRIDDLE, DEPT OF ENERGY  
MR APPELYARD CABINET OFFICE

PAGE 2  
UNCLASSIFIED

MR W D REEVES CABINET OFFICE  
SIR C CURWEN CABINET OFFICE  
MR CHARLTON CABINET OFFICE  
MR GOWAN, CABINET OFFICE  
PS/NUMBER 10 DOWNING ST  
SIR P CRADOCK, 10 DOWNING ST  
CABINET OFFICE DIO  
SIR ROBIN BUTLER, CAB OFFICE  
LT COL CRONIN CAB OFFICE  
MR SHAPLAND CAB OFFICE  
AUS (C) MODUK  
HD/SEC (O) (C) MODUK  
MR LS SMITH BANK ENGLAND 2  
MR WICKS HMT

010

CONFIDENTIAL



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 071-21 82111/3

MO 6/17/15/1J

6<sup>th</sup> February 1991

*[Handwritten checkmark]*

*[Handwritten signature]*  
*[Handwritten initials]*

*Dear Charles,*

VISIT BY DR SOMMARUGA, PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

In advance of the Prime Minister's meeting with Dr Sommaruga tomorrow, you may like to see the attached record of the latter's discussion with the Defence Secretary this afternoon.

The meeting was friendly throughout but, as you will see, the Defence Secretary spoke in fairly frank terms and Dr Sommaruga could have been left in no doubt about the strength of feeling on our side.

I also attach the text of an MOD Press Release on the meeting, which was issued tonight.

I am copying this letter and attachments to Richard Gozney (FCO), Tony Pawson (NIO), and Suma Chakrabarti (ODA).

*Yours ever* *[Signature]*

(S J AMBLER-EDWARDS) (MISS)  
Private Secretary

Sir Charles Powell KCMG  
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL



MO 6/17/15/1J

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE  
AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS,  
DR CORNELIO SOMMARUGA, IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, WEDNESDAY 6TH  
FEBRUARY AT 1500

Those present:

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

Dr Cornelio Sommaruga  
President of the International  
Committee of the Red Cross

Mr Richard Hatfield  
Head of Secretariat  
(Overseas)(Commitments)  
MOD

Mr Michel Convers  
Head Operational Support Dept,  
ICRC

Miss Glyn Evans,  
Head of UN Department, FCO

Mr Paul Grossrieder  
Deputy Director of Operations  
ICRC

Miss S J Ambler-Edwards  
Assistant Private Secretary/  
Secretary of State for Defence

After initial pleasantries, Dr Sommaruga said he wished to express his sympathy for those members of the British Armed Forces who had become casualties of the present conflict. He had nothing but praise for the position of Her Majesty's Government, and for the Ministry of Defence, in their determination to meet the requirements of the Geneva Conventions. In particular, he welcomed our "model behaviour" notifying the names of Iraqis who had been detained in the United Kingdom. The ICRC "absolute priority" now was to secure visits to allied prisoners of war held in Iraq.

2. The Secretary of State thanked Dr Sommaruga for his kind remarks and said we were most anxious to be told if the ICRC observed any shortcomings in our approach; it was of the utmost importance to the British Government that we should meet our obligations under the various Conventions in full. What was crucial now - and indeed it was a matter of great public concern here - was that there should be equal observance of the Conventions by the Iraqis. Feelings had clearly been exacerbated by the harrowing television pictures of the captured allied pilots; we were looking to the ICRC to bring every pressure to bear on the Iraqis to fulfil their own commitments. The Italian Defence Minister, Signor Rognoni, with whom he had had lunch today, felt very much the same way.

3. Responding, Dr Sommaruga said that, to take the Secretary of State's first point, the ICRC had absolutely no complaints about the approach of the British Government. ICRC officials had already visited those under detention in the UK and their reports had been



filed; while there were minor points of advice offered, there was no substantive criticism. The very fact that these visits had taken place, and with such an obviously excellent outcome, had strengthened the moral pressure which the ICRC could bring to bear on the Iraqis.

4. There then followed a brief discussion during which the Secretary of State explained that the British Government would retain responsibility for POWs captured by British Forces, even if the POWs were later passed to the custody of another nation.

5. Dr Sommaruga said that great pressure was being maintained on the Iraqis. The ICRC had made a series of demarches, seeking access to allied POWs, protesting at the exposure on television of captured pilots, and objecting to reports that POWs would be held at strategic sites. They were doing everything possible - but he had to admit that no progress had yet been made. He explained that communication with Iraqi commanders was difficult; it was impossible for Baghdad based ICRC delegates to meet the commanders - they were simply not around (either in bunkers or out of the city). Any communication with the Iraqi authorities, even in Baghdad, had to be made in writing at present. Diplomatic contacts were mainly achieved through sources in Geneva and these were now being supplemented through the Iraqi embassies in Amman and Tehran.

6. In Dr Sommaruga's experience, the Iraqis placed great emphasis on equality of treatment. While he would therefore continue to keep great pressure on them in private, he was reluctant to come out in public with any direct criticisms of the Iraqi Government. He commented that the fact that access had not been permitted to allied POWs for a fortnight should not be seen in an overly negative light. He was confident that the ICRC would gain access in the end - although not so confident about the condition the POWs would be in. Referring to the message from Senor Rognoni relayed by the Secretary of State, Dr Sommaruga said that he accepted this, but that the Italian Government should itself give some thought to giving the ICRC access to the crews of two Iraqi ships which it was detaining.

7. The Secretary of State said that he had listened carefully to what Dr Sommaruga had had to say but felt he had to voice strong reservations. What was at issue was not simply the cold formalities of international law, but the distress of families who did not know whether their missing relatives were alive or dead, or held captive. He was particularly concerned at Dr Sommaruga's suggestion that a fortnight's delay in securing access was not too bad. The Geneva Conventions held that access should be granted as soon as possible. It was not as if we were dealing with a complex land battle where, he accepted, it might be difficult to establish the basic facts; we were talking here about the cases of airmen captured in isolated and separate incidents and the Iraqis clearly already had in their possession all the necessary information about them.





8. There was a grave risk that the ICRC approach would be misunderstood by the British public who, in the absence of any condemnation of the Iraqis, might perceive some imbalance in the situation - particularly if the ICRC was seen to be providing medical help for the people of Iraq. There could be damage to the ICRC's public image. Perhaps some forum might be found in which the shortcomings of the Iraqi Government's performance could be clearly identified - this might help to retrieve the position?

9. Dr Sommaruga said that his remarks about a fortnight not being a long period were made against the background of other recent world conflicts (the Iran/Iraq war in particular) during which families, unfortunately, had had to wait a period of several years before knowing the fate of their missing relatives. He had every sympathy for the families concerned, but these were the hard realities. The ICRC team in Baghdad consisted of a Head of Delegation who had five colleagues ready to carry out visits to POWs; and they were supported by one doctor and one male nurse. However no-one in the delegation had been able to talk to the Iraqi authorities since 17th January. Several letters had been written but no substantive replies received. His own priority as President of the ICRC was to gain access to allied POWs; and he feared that a critical public stance against the Iraqis might only result in his staff being thrown out of Baghdad, thus setting back the whole process. Dr Sommaruga greatly appreciated and hoped for the continued public confidence of the British Government which was essential if they were to make progress.

10. Dr Sommaruga then revealed that he had written a personal letter to President Saddam Hussein asking for a meeting. [This should be protected]. He was ready to go to Baghdad at any moment and would be happy to speak to Tariq Aziz if Saddam Hussein should not be available. Asked by the Secretary of State about contacts in Geneva, Dr Sommaruga said that he found Saddam Hussein's brother-in-law, Mr Al Takriti an extremely arrogant man and very difficult to communicate with; he had been trying for a dialogue with him but was not optimistic about the chances. The ICRC's own Delegate General for the Middle East who had past experience of dealing with the Iraqis was however about to leave for Baghdad; he would expect to arrive, via Iran, on Saturday. No appointments had been made for him, but it was important that he should be on the spot.

11. The main message which Dr Sommaruga wanted to leave with the Secretary of State was that the ICRC greatly appreciated the support of the British Government and that it was fully committed to play out its mandate to the end. The ICRC worked best by relying on the force of law and on its ability to bring moral pressure to bear. There were no sanctions as such which it could apply. The ICRC would continue to rely heavily on the support of allied Governments.

CONFIDENTIAL



12. Summing up his own position, the Secretary of State said that he had spoken frankly; that he had made clear that the fulfilment by Iraq of its obligations was a matter of great public importance in the United Kingdom; and that no stone should be left unturned in the efforts to bring the Iraqi Government into line. The ICRC and Allied Governments should keep in the closest possible touch.

SMS

(S J AMBLER-EDWARDS) (MISS)  
APS/S of S

CONFIDENTIAL

PRESS RELEASE

MEETING WITH PRESIDENT OF ICRC

The Defence Secretary met the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, on Wednesday 6 February. Mr King emphasised the depth of concern throughout the UK about the fate of RAF and other allied aircrew in Iraqi hands. It was especially worrying that the ICRC had been unable to obtain access to or even notification of those held despite the fact that some had already been shown on Iraqi television. Not only was this in breach of the Geneva Convention but the condition of the prisoners gave rise to concern. Mr King contrasted this with the UK's determination scrupulously to fulfil its obligations under the Geneva Conventions. Dr Sommaruga expressed his appreciation for the way in which the UK had provided notification and access to Iraqis held in the UK and confirmed that this was in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. The Defence Secretary urged the ICRC to continue to press the Iraqis similarly to fulfil their obligations and Dr Sommaruga said that visiting allied PW was an absolute priority for the ICRC.

BF 6.2.91

~~Day~~ Clerk



M. - add  
to memo  
for Mr.

10 DOWNING STREET

Ch

~~Charles~~

Call by the  
President of Red  
Cross on Thursday  
7 Feb at 1715

Sonmaruga will be  
accompanied by:

PIERRE KELLER  
(ICRC Extension  
Council)

PAUL GROSSRIEDER  
(Deputy Director  
Operations)

S. 4/2

FILE

WS



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON, SW1A 2AA

*From the Private Secretary*

11 October 1990

Thank you for your letter of 9 October about the visit by Mr. Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Prime Minister would be able to see him at 1715 on Thursday, 7 February.

C. D. POWELL

S. L. Gass, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

car



CDD  
1715 on  
Thurs 7th  
February  
AP 11/10

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 October 1990

Dear Charles,

~~Answer~~  
Can we do this?  
OK

In your letter of 11 August you said that the Prime Minister would welcome a call by Sommaruga, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) early next year. Mr Sommaruga has proposed 6 or 7 February. Perhaps you would let me know if these dates are convenient for the Prime Minister.

Yours ever,  
S L Gass

(S L Gass)  
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq  
10 Downing Street



210.10



*With the compliments of*

**THE PRIVATE SECRETARY**

Lizzie.

We spoke yesterday.  
I hope this is the letter  
you were looking for

**FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**

**SW1A 2AH**



Hague,

Pl. CC : Assistants : UNJ

ECJ(E)



Mr Carey, CDH

Chanceries: Berne  
UK/115 Geneva

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

VJ 13/8 + pa

WED

PS

PS/Mr Guel-Jone

Mr Greenstock

Protocol

5

(pa) ICRC: meeting etc TR

Mr Waples

return 13/8

11 August 1990

Good. dw 14/8

15/8

SAL

13/8

When you came to see me on 25 July we discussed a number of forthcoming visits and the possibility of the Prime Minister attending the 700th Anniversary Dinner and Dance as part of the Festival of Switzerland, on 9 March 1991.

I can confirm that the Prime Minister would in principle be happy to see Mr. Delamuraz on 29 October this year: we will be in touch to propose an exact time. She would also welcome a call by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross in January next year. Perhaps you could let me know the exact date for his visit in due course. I regret to say, however, that it is unlikely that the Prime Minister would be able to attend the Dinner and Dance on 9 March because of other engagements at that time. I am sorry to disappoint you on this.

US 250/8		
RECEIVED IN REGISTRY		
15 AUG 1990		
DESK OF	PA	RY
INDEX	PA	IND. FAX
C:D POWELL		

His Excellency Monsieur Franz E. Muheim

# Grey Scale #13



**A**

1

2

3

4

5

6

**M**

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

**B**

17

18

19

