

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

June 13th, 1951

Description: This recording was produced while ER was in Geneva, Switzerland. In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question regarding Swiss neutrality. In the following segment, ER interviews Dr. Paul Ruegger, president of the International Red Cross.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, two unknown speakers on Israel, Dr. Paul Ruegger

[ER:] How do you do? This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. We are continuing with the programs which I recorded while I was in Europe attending the United Nations Human Rights Commission meetings.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] One of the most important organizations headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, is the International Red Cross. Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today is Dr. Paul Ruegger, president of it. As recorded from the Palais Des Nations in Geneva and flown to the United States through the courtesy of Swiss Air, Dr. Ruegger will tell us of the work performed for people throughout the world. Before we hear this interview, Mrs. Roosevelt and I will discuss the letter sent in by a listener, which in a way is allied with some of the things Dr. Ruegger has to say. But first, our announcer has some interesting things to tell us about the sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

[Break 1:07-1:20]

[Elliott Roosevelt: Mrs. Leon Berman of Seekonk, Massachusetts, has written a letter to me uh commenting on one of Mrs. Roosevelt's discussions with a guest in Geneva, Switzerland. I'm going to read this letter and then Mrs. Roosevelt and I will discuss it. Mrs. Berman says, "I'm a very staunch follower of your mother's very interesting and educational program. It is indeed a first must on my daily schedule. I did not agree, however, with the Swiss professor's explanation of his country's present day neutrality. With all due respect to the worthy Swiss citizens, how long could they remain neutral, and how long could all the 758,000 soldiers, men and women included, defend themselves against a big conquering power were it Germany or the USSR or any other invader? Is it not true that there is an agreement somewhere among the big powers to have the little country of Switzerland, whose chief attraction is scenery, plus cheeses and watches, be the international bank of Europe, if not the world? During World War II, Poland, a country of forty million, and Holland toppled like wooden soldiers. Certainly the Swiss too, William Tell included, are only of flesh and blood. I feel as if the worthy Swiss professor insulted one's intelligence with his explanation. And I know that you will do a much better job of it. I will be listening as always." (2:55)

[ER:] Well, I don't know whether among the greater powers uh there is um an agreement uh to [ER clears throat] make Switzerland a sort of international depository for their money, but I feel very sure that's not the case. It is true that a certain number of refugees deposited money there. The Germans deposited money there, uh and they-- it was accepted because they had representatives there, but then they also deposited money in Spain to a great extent and also in Argentina. And so [ER clears throat] I don't think you can feel that there is any agreement among great nations on that particular point. But I think there is an understandable feeling among the Swiss that being a very small nation, if they preserve their neutrality, which in the past um they could uh feel was possible to defend because of natural mountainous barriers. Uh nowadays, with the aeroplane, any intelligent Swiss will tell you that they know quite well every city could be leveled off. They still have a certain amount of confidence that they could defend their mountains. They've fortified them very greatly and hidden fortifications and, as you know, every citizen

is a soldier. They still have that feeling. Um justified or not justified, um you know that uh you can-- they know that every city in Switzerland could be smashed flat by air. But to actually occupy a country you've got to do it with infantry. And they may have some justification that at least for a fairly long period they might be able to defend those mountains.

Um how-how long nor how costly it would be nor what it would be--if it would be worth doing is a very questionable thing. But um they've been lucky in the past. Uh they lay it to their neutrality. There were other nations who tried being neutral but happened to be in a more vulnerable and uh-uh position because they happened to be good passageways, and their neutrality didn't save them. Now geography has been kind to Switzerland because it really is harder to go places through Switzerland than any other way, and so it's probably logical uh to take the easy ways in whatever direction you want to go. And Switzerland has not been, uh therefore, the target that she might've been. And so that perhaps they have a justification, they have great faith because they are building. Building uh always means I think that a-a nation feels a certain sense of security. I was very much interested in an exhibition uh that the USSR showed us at the building going on in Moscow because I felt that that was like saying, "We don't believe there's going to be a war." Because you don't really build in order to have it destroyed. What's the use? And just as Switzerland has been building great factories of late and making vast improvements, you feel that must come from a sense that war is not uh imminent, because those factories could be destroyed. (7:07)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. Well, I-I think I'd like to -- I remember that interview very well uh with the professor, and I felt that what he was trying to say was that the-that it is possible, in a divided world for a small people, and because of the geographical location of-of the country and also because of the physical form of the country, as you have pointed out, it is possible for the Swiss people to act as uh a means of contact when all other contacts are broken down, as happened during the First World War and the Second World War. Switzerland was a means of contact behind the warring armies and a great deal of negotiation and so forth, not only on a governmental level, but international business uh kept its contacts going uh in the areas of trade that were cut off due to the war, and they were able to get information which was not available any other way. The Swiss have profited by that situation. Now also I think that the Swiss feel in today's divided world that between the Soviet system and what we call the free world, that they the Swiss are a means of contact through the fact that they represent and uh-and are the headquarters of such organizations as the International Red Cross.

[ER:] I was going to bring that out, that the International Red Cross, whose members are all Swiss, whose governing board is all Swiss, [Elliott Roosevelt: That's right.] um is one of the international factors that they count on [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes, you see--] as tying them in to all the countries of the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You see, if it wasn't for that, [ER coughs] uh it is doubtful whether the uh Russians or any other communist countries would recognize previous international agreement for prisoners and so forth, but they have hesitated, to date at least, to cut off and say, "We don't believe in the International Red Cross" because of the effect of world opinion. And for that reason, there are Swiss people who are in China today who, while the reports evidently are rather meager, at least are bringing us some information [ER: Well, the head of the--] about what happens to our prisoners.

[ER:] Oh, but the head of the Swiss uh International Red Cross visited Russia and China recently, and um has his contact with the Chinese woman who heads up the International Red Cross in China.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And uh through that we are getting information, some information, maybe not accurate-- [ER: It's very meager, but still we do get some.] And uh it is a means for us to struggle to uh keep up uh the-the humanitarian aspects of war. I think it's very difficult to say that the war has any humanitarian aspects, but uh at least the-the treatment of prisoners-- that we are giving information to the Swiss so that the Chinese communists can know what has happened to the Chinese prisoners, and that

they're not being massacred as is put out through propaganda, that they are being fed and properly clothed and housed.

[ER:] And in return we ask for information which we only very occasionally get, there is certain propaganda in information that's being given out through the USSR um, which is highly unreliable. It's given to the families of um prisoners and supposedly purports to come from those prisoners, but I don't think it's very reliable. (11:09)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That-that-therefore is what the Swiss people feel their role in international life is as long as a divided world continues.

[ER:] Well, they are joining too some of the specialized agencies and um while they cling to the neutrality and think that it's the one thing that saves them, uh it's not. When-when the Swiss professor, who happens to be Professor [William] Rappard, who spent a great deal of time in this country and who is the head of international--of the high-higher school for advanced studies in Geneva. Um he's a very intelligent man and a man who knows the world. And I don't think that it was insulting to our intelligence, what he said. I think he was really trying to make us understand why this peculiar um psychology existed among the Swiss. Now we may think that the Swiss could be wiped out tomorrow, and in one sense they could be, but psychologically it's valuable that their feelings should go on.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. Well, I think that answers as best we can Mrs. Berman's letter. And now I see that we must go on to another part of the program after hearing a very important message from our sponsors who make the program possible.

[Break 12:34-12:50]

[ER:] And now, Elliott, I think our radio audience would be interested in hearing a recording. A part of a very timely discussion which took place on our Sunday afternoon NBC television program.

[Plays recording from *Eleanor Roosevelt Meets the Public* that aired on June 3, 1951.]

[ER:] The Middle East, which was the cradle of modern civilization, remains today a key area in our complicated world society. Its strategic and economic importance is vital in the balance between Western and communist powers. For this reason, particularly, the political instability and social unrest in the Middle East is of the greatest concern to the United States. We have devoted the last two programs to a review of the Iranian crisis. Today, in discussing the inflammable Arab-Israel dispute, we turn to another Middle Eastern danger point. This is also a most serious threat to the United Nation's efforts towards world peace. My two guests today are both highly qualified as spokesmen for the two opposing camps in the Middle Eastern sore spot. (14:16)

[Hussein Kamel Salim Bey:] Well, uh could you tell me what your attitude is on the question of the human rights of the refugees that have been pushed out of Palestine all these years?

[ER:] I think that where resettlement within -- where their homes still existed, where it was a possibility for them to go back um one would say that they should go back. But where their homes are gone, where there is grown up so much um antagonism [Hussein Kamal Salim Bey: It's only three years ago, you know, it's not --] then I would--Yes, but war is gone and feelings have gone enormously, and you can't judge by years only. Then I would say that it would be better for the world if the world helped in every possible way to resettle those refugees, and I think we should be as generous as possible in the efforts for resettlement. Now--

[Harry Zindler:] Well, what I wanted to ask, Mrs. Roosevelt, I know that you have followed the fortunes of Israel with considerable interest. Uh there is being established on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean a very solid democracy. Don't you believe that it would be in the interest of the United States government to assist that state by a-a grant?

[ER:] I don't really know because uh while we have given um through the United States for the care of Arab refugees -- I mean through the government -- uh and we have not done that. There's been so much that went from this country, from the Jewish population, that I'm not sure what the reaction in the country would be to a-an actual government grant. I would say that what should happen, and it would be in the interest of Israel, would be to help the resettlement and the calming down of that whole area via resettlement as much as possible because I think that would give more to Israel and more to all of us than anything else.

[Recording from *Eleanor Roosevelt Meets the Public* ends.]

[Break 16:31- 16:41]

[ER:] Headquarters of the International Red Cross organization being here in Geneva, I'm very happy to have the opportunity to have my guest today the president of this organization, Mr. Paul Ruegger. One of the most important services of the Red Cross is the handling of prisoners of war, something of interest these days to not only those in the United States with relatives fighting in Korea, but to persons throughout the world. And Mr. Ruegger will be able to tell us much about this situation. I present to you Mr. Ruegger.

[Paul Ruegger:] We are so happy, Mrs. Roosevelt, to have you visit in Geneva and we are greatly honored by the visit you so kindly pay to the headquarters of our old founder organization of the Red Cross.

[ER:] It's very kind of you to say that, Mr. Ruegger, and before I begin actually asking you questions, I want to speak for a minute about a very important date. On the eighth of May, I understand that you celebrated uh the um birthday I think of Henry Dunant who was the founder of the interna-- of the Red Cross. And um the first time you did this I understand that um you had a radio um talk and uh five countries took part. And this last time, this year, there were eleven countries taking part and fourteen radio chains. Now I'm hoping, because this is an important date, that by next year uh the United States, particularly, and many of the Americas will be joining in to celebrate this anniversary because we should do everything possible to remind ourselves of the importance of this organization. Now let's come back to the questions. I want to ask you for our audience at home in the United States if you will tell us what the International Committee of the Red Cross is and how must the term "international" in its title be understood?

[Paul Ruegger:] Since its foundation in 1863, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been composed exclusively of Swiss citizens recruited by cooperation and whose number must not exceed twenty-five. It is thus national in its composition, while its activities are wholly international. This contradiction is apparent only. If the committee is to be neutral towards all religions, its impartiality must be beyond question. This vital condition is fulfilled in the virtue of the effect that all members of the committee are citizens of this small country, without political ambitions, where neutrality for centuries past has been recognized both by tradition and by treaty. It is in its work however that the committee is above all international, aiming as it does at attenuating the suffering caused by war and disturbances throughout the world. The Red Cross is essentially universal.

[ER:] That's very interesting because the fact that you've been able to keep your freedom and keep your neutrality does make it possible for you to act as an international organization in this situation. Uh what are the basic principles on which the Geneva Conventions are founded?

[Paul Ruegger:] The Geneva Conventions, like the Red Cross itself, are founded on the principle that those who suffer must be respected and cared for with the same attention whether they be friends or foes. This principle, at first applied to the military wounded and sick, has gradually been extended to include all categories of war victims. Prisoners of war and shipwrecked persons were the first to benefit from this extension. Today the signature in 1949 of the fourth Geneva Convention has given civilians the safeguards of which for so long and with such tragic consequences, they were deprived.

[ER:] What is the status of the International Committee of the Red Cross as defined by the said conventions? (22:42)

[Paul Ruegger:] The competencies recognized to the international committee by the 1929 convention were considerably widened in 1949. Its working possibilities in particular have been enlarged, and the international committee can now be considered as a recognized institution under international law. Certain rights have been specified. That of setting up essential information agencies which, as its name indicates, collects all the information which states should provide about prisoners of war and interned enemy civilians; the right of having camps for prisoners of war, civil attorneys, and others visited by impartial delegate. One article of the conventions underlines the particularly important right of initiative. This article gives the committee the right to take, even outside the framework of the conventions, all steps it may consider necessary to protect war victims and to assist them. This, of course, with agreement and help of the authorities concerned. It was on this apparently slender basis that the committee carried out the greater part of its activities during two world wars. Provisions are also made for intervention by the committee in case of civil war, a substitute also for the so called protecting powers should these be for any reason prevented from acting in the distribution of relief, in arranging communication by civilian messages, between relatives separated by the war events, and so forth.

[ER:] That's a very wide field that you could operate in. What is the position of the International Committee of the Red Cross as regards government authority?

[Paul Ruegger:] The International Committee is, of course, entirely independent of all governments, as it is likewise in regards- in regard to national or international politics and confessional or other considerations. Neutrality requires that its attitude be strictly impartial in regards to all states. This being understood, and although formal rights are accorded under the Geneva conventions, the international committee can act only with the consent of governments and with their help. Most often it can only request not require. The very nature of its work demands that the committee shall have continued and constant relations with governments. The governments are responsible for the treatment of prisoners of war and interned civilians whom they detain. The vast expenditure incurred during the Second World War has been borne for more than half of its amount by free contributions from the Swiss people. The committee's relations with governments, of course, form no obstacle to its close and constant relations with national Red Cross societies. These societies moreover are also invited to give the committee the support they can.

[ER:] That is a very clear exposition, and now just at this point I think we will stop for one minute and give our announcer a chance to say a word.

[Break 27:33-27:43]

[ER:] Now we will come back to our very interesting talk with Mr. Ruegger of the International Committee of the Red Cross--President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The other evening I had an opportunity, Mr. Ruegger, to talk to you for a few minutes about your recent travels to the Soviet Union and China. Could you tell us a little of the results you may have achieved in those travels or what you feel about them?

[Paul Ruegger:] The International Committee and its president consider it our duty to establish and to develop personal contacts with all national Red Cross societies, great and small. It is with this purpose in mind that I went to the Soviet Union and to China. I trust that the talks both in Moscow and in Peking, also on the basic principles which govern the International Red Cross, have paved the way for further conversations. In both capitals, I found genuine interest in our progress. By following up these talks, I feel that much useful work can be done in the field of mutual understanding.

[ER:] Um in both the Soviet Union and um uh communist China you have Red Cross committees?

[Paul Ruegger:] There are national Red Cross societies. [ER: Societies.] In Russia there is a vast alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies of the Soviet Union. And in China there is a vast uh Red Cross society too.

[ER:] Are they both headed by men?

[Paul Ruegger:] The uh so the alliance of the Red Cross and Crescent societies is headed by uh a distinguished uh-uh physician, Professor [V.A.] Kholodkov. The president of the Chinese Red Cross is Madame Li Dequan, head minister in Peking.

[ER:] It's interesting. I wanted to find out if there was a woman in a position as important as that. I think that's uh very interesting to find, that there is one actually carrying some heavy responsibility.

[Paul Ruegger:] The head of Red Cross -- of women in the Red Cross work is always very great. It'll always be one of the principles of our committee too.

[ER:] Well now, I'd like to ask you something which in the United States will mean a great deal. Did you manage to learn anything in Peking about our prisoners in North Korea?

[Paul Ruegger:] The Chinese Red Cross, as well as all other Red Cross societies, are aware of the anxiety of the Red Cross world in general regarding the prisoners of war. The committee, as you know, is always anxious and has undertaken every possible step in Pyongyang, which is the capital of North Korea, to have news about them. According to the provisions of the Geneva Conventions to institute inquiries about them on behalf of their relatives and to provide them with material relief, especially medical help, both for prisoners of war and for the civilian population as far as war victims are concerned. (32:01)

[ER:] Well, uh I wondered if you can give me assurances as to the cooperative attitude of the Chinese Red Cross as regards the application of the conventions and their earlier ratification, I mean, of course, the communist Chinese Red Cross.

[Paul Ruegger:] I have full confidence in the cooperative attitude of all Red Cross societies the world over, and in reply to your question, Mrs. Roosevelt, in particular concerning the Chinese Red Cross. As far as the Geneva Conventions are concerned, it may interest you to know that the Chinese Red Cross has prepared their full translation into Chinese thus proving their deep interest in the matter. Furthermore, the Chinese Red Cross has asked for full information on the Red Cross in international law and on our

activities in general. We are, of course, anxious to make all documents available to the last-vest societies of the Red Cross in Peking.

[ER:] And you hope that they will ratify?

[Paul Ruegger:] I take it as a very good sign that the translation into Chinese [ER: Chinese is being made-] is being made, and I feel sure that the Chinese Red Cross is anxious for a speedy and general ratification of the forty-ninth convention.

[ER:] That's encouraging. That's very encouraging. Well now, you've spoken of the International Committee of the Red Cross as an essentially neutral and independent body. Might I ask you what precisely should be understood by these terms?

[Paul Ruegger:] It is a recognized function of the International Committee, which founded the Red Cross almost ninety years ago, to watch over the application of the basic Red Cross principles. Of these, neutrality and independence are the most important. I should add perhaps universality. The work of the International committee is inseparable from these conceptions. In wartime it can intervene between belligerents only on terms of absolute neutrality and for this it must enjoy the complete confidence of all governments. During its long history, the committee otherwise could never have done a fraction of what it succeeded in achieving and would never have been trusted with many and often very delicate questions it has been called upon to solve. It has been called upon to solve in particular during the Second World War under the leadership of my great predecessor, Professor Max Huber whom I am privileged of seeing today in Geneva. (35:39)

[ER:] I am very much interested in all you've told me, and now I'd like to ask you a little bit because in the United States there is a great interest in the Red Cross -- you see in the national Red Cross -- and comparatively little is really known of the international uh body. So I was particularly glad today that we could have an explanation that would go to the people on that. Um and with us it's the one organization that is allowed to collect money in our public schools, and the one organization that um is practically known everywhere. I mean where you have no other organization you have the Red Cross organization, and they have their campaign and they do their work. And I wonder if you find uh in going around to the different countries that there is difficulty in keeping your workers together uh when you are not actually at war, when-when a country is not at war. Do you have-- do you find that difficulty in different countries? Because the Red Cross has meant to meet emergencies but I sometimes find that groups that came together and worked together in a war um don't work as ardently when they're just getting ready for an emergency. Do you find that anywhere else?

[Paul Ruegger:] The Red Cross, Mrs. Roosevelt, has of course very vast tasks also in peace time. It is specifically the function of the international committee to be ready in times of war, of civil war and of strife. And I may perhaps just say a word of our own problems in this field. We must, of course, count always on a good and efficient skeleton staff, but we count also, always, and we know that we can rely upon this, on the help of the hundreds and-or thousands of voluntary workers which will respond immediately to an earnest appeal. During the Second World War the International Committee uh enlisted the help of about six thousand people.

[ER:] I see, but you-you then do have down to a skeleton force and when war comes you come up very quickly. [Paul Ruegger: That-that is just right] That's very interesting, and I hope that's the same in our domestic work. I want to tell you that I'm sorry our time has come to a close, and we have to stop this talk. But I want to thank you so much for being with me today Dr.--Mr. Ruegger.

[Paul Ruegger:] It was a very great privilege too, and a delight for the committee and for me uh to have you here today Mrs. Roosevelt and we hope that, as you have been once to our headquarters, you will often come again and give us the benefit of your uh views and you're always interesting advice.

[ER:] Thank you.

(Break 39:13 -39:24)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alexander the Great received the sword of his father and the wealth of his father and said, "It is a great heritage." You have a greater and I have a greater heritage, and as days go by we recognize our heritage as more and more important. For ours is a heritage of hard won rights, a heritage of priceless freedoms. These rights and these freedoms belong to millions of us. These rights and freedoms we must keep by active citizenship you can help keep them. Practice democracy in your home, be on guard against prejudice, exercise your right to vote, pay taxes, serve on the jury, obey the law, support your schools, and join in community activities whenever you can. In this way you are an active, valuable citizen. Of course, nobody knows when we may be called on for greater effort as citizens, but we appreciate the value of our heritage of freedom. We are ready to give whatever it takes and to keep it, and there's nothing we can't do with all of us agreeing that freedom is everybody's job. This is Elliott Roosevelt speaking and reminding you that you've been listening to *The Eleanor Roosevelt Program* which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. Today's program was recorded in Switzerland and we wish to thank the Swiss Broadcasting System for making their facilities available to us and also Swiss Air for transporting the recordings.

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