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Charity top on

organization’s list

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Information Officer

This month, the Kenya Red Cross

Society (KRCS) marks its 30th anniversary with pride and confidence. The rallying theme this year

is: "30 years at work: Alleviating

human suffering. '

From an extension of the British

Red Cross Society in 1939, the

KRCS has emerged as an efficient

organisation Of charity at the local

level today.

The organisation has grown in

strength, attracted many members

and made a mark in the country. It

is today held in high esteem and regarded as a saviour of the people at

t time Of need.

Its history dates back to the war

time. On the eve of the Second

World War in 1939, the British Red

Cross was all out to strengthen the

local chapter as well as others in the

region to prepare them for coming

humanitarian challenges.

At the time, Red Cross activities

were reserved for the white-minority.

In preparation to With the

Second World War. a network of I I

Red Cross branches were established in the areas then referred to

as the White Highland.

What were the activities then?

Together with the St John Ambulance, the Red Cross offered first

aid training and home nursing to the

European settlers and later the services were extended to everybody.

diverted

They also

to

other welfare activities which included: Junior Red Cross activities

within the school systems.

also staled health institutions like the Dagoretti

Centre and. offered relief for those

affected by wars and other calamities.

Other voluntary activities were

tracing missing persons, farm dispensaries, hospital comforts and

loans of equipment to handicapped

people.

The Mau Mau uprising was a

turning point in the history of the

organisation. it necessitated indiscriminate assistance. Help was given

Grassroot

en to all in recognition of one of its

fundamental principles — neutrality to victims of armed confrontation.

Mr Andrew Okoth, a KRCS long

serving staff, says assistance to the

local population during the emergency included medical services,

aid and blood transfusion.

A major relief effort was

taken after the Lari massacre.

"The Red Cross volunteers organised health and welfare

programmes for women and children in detention camps." says Mr

Ok 0th.

By the early 1960s, the Kenyan

branch of the British Red Cross was

a small but well organised institution which gave humanitarian

assistance and social services.

Mr Okoth says the branch owned

a building at St Johns Gate,

Nairobi, which housed its head office and operated a number of clinics, nutrition centres, homes for the

handicapped and it had a substantial centre Of active volunteers.

With an exodus Of volunteers

from British With the advent Of in-

dependence in 1963, clamour for a

true local organisation gathered

momentum. The First Mayor of

Nairobi, Mr Charles Wanyoike Rubia. assumed leadership of the local

body as Mrs Rachael Mzera became its first director.

"Our acceptance of the Geneva

conventions must never become

empty words or a meaningless connection Other societies. It is

now up to us Red Cross people of

Kenya to spread the knowledge Of

the rights and duties we have in the

Red Cross. We must get our organisation to be a popular movement,

said when the KRCS was founded

on 21, 1965, through an

Act Of Parliament.

for two decades and finally

resigned 'n 1986.

At its formation, the objectives

of the says the secretary-general, Mr Ephraim M. Gathaiya, was to provide relief to victims of natural and man-made

disasters and in peace time, prevent

The President of District OT the Swedish Red Cross, Mrs Lena Thuntorg, the

multi-purpose as officials 100k on.

diseases and carry out health

services.

It was also the aim Of the Red

Cross, adds Mr Gathaiya, to serve

all people under the guiding .principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

• The National Society was re-

cognised as a true indigenous organisation by the International

Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) in 1966 and the International Federation of Red Cross in

1967.'

Soon after it was founded, the

first development plan was formulated and the priority was to build

and strengthen capacity Of Red

A number of branches were started to respond to the needs Of the

most vulnerable at the grassroot

levels.

Says Mr Okoth: "Health service

was given priority and welfare

work for disaster victims and Other

vulnerable groups, training of

membership and public in mary

Health Care and First Aid.

In 1970, there was widespread

famine in the arid and semi-arid

parts of the country. Together with

the International Federation, the

victims were assisted and the

National Society consolidated itself

for further development through a

second plan — 1971 - 1973 which

an increase Of Red Cross

These assisted in many activities

particularly in first aid and training

of nurses.

In 1979, severe drought hit the

West Pokot District and spread to

Turkana and Garissa districts.

"The alleviation of emergency

conditions in West Pokot and Turkana was the largest and longest relief effort undertaken by the Kenya

Red Cross," wrote Mr Brian Hodgson in a to the Federation in

1983.

The 1970-1973 and the 1973

1976 development plans focused

branch activities Which were

in scope. Many more were

towards the end Of the 1980s

serve the increasing population.

intention Of the o ni io

is to reach all corners oftk

as the demand for its

m greases.

The Governor Of the

Society, Mr Stephen Muriu

"The Red Cross in this country

assisted victims of various

such as Refugees from Somalia

those from Rwanda. We have a

assisted when there IS floods

drought. "

The Red Cross was also very

active at the height of the ethnic clashes by providing assistance to the internally displaced persons,

added.

Mr Muriu says Red Cross h

complimented the efforts Of t

Government to offer heal

services.

It hag started primary heal

programmes in various districts including Nakuru, Nyandarua,

Kakamega, Kilifi,

Homa Bay.

'We have also played a

role in curbing the spread

deadly disease — Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids)

through educational campaigns.

training counsellors and

donating equipment to GO

hospitals to screen blood of

Campaigns

HIV virus. We have also conduct

counselling sessions at the community counselling centres,"

Munu adds.

These activities, including blood

donation campaigns, encouraging

women in development. v:si

of first aid services a training

youth have targeted the needy

our communities, said Mr Muriu.

As a non-profit making organisation, the Red Cross has provided

services free of charge.

However, Mr Muriu says, for

to continue carrying its noble

the organisation needs the support

Of everyone.

"This institution Of charity,

gently needs Sh66 million to

out its activities next year

would Wish to appeal to members

of the public to support the

the Red Cross through financial

material contribution, " said

Muriu.

The organisation Will have

organise fund raising activities

get money to achieve its many

objectives, he said.

But despite the shortfalls in

congratulate Red

cross society on the

occasion of its 30th

anniversary

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International Committee of

The Red Cross

as they celebrate their 30th Anniversary