

Central Tracing Agency

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CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

In 1982, the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) of the ICRC continued its activities as laid down by the Geneva Conventions for the victims of conflicts, often long after the actual hostilities had ceased. Thus 38 years after the end of the Second World War, 25% of the CTA's activities at its Geneva headquarters are still connected with the after-effects of this conflict. Moreover, several inquiries concerning prisoners of war, internees and missing persons of the First World War were also handled during the year. In addition, the CTA was intensely active, both at headquarters and in the field, in connection with new conflicts (South Atlantic) and those in progress (Iran/Iraq and the Lebanon).

Besides the specific tasks entrusted to it by the Geneva Conventions, the CTA also carried out important work pursuant to the ICRC's right of humanitarian initiative (registering of detainees and refugees, provision of travel documents, issuing of certificates of captivity, death, sickness, etc.).

An event of major significance for the CTA also took place in 1982: the organization, in Geneva, of the first international technical seminar, attended by representatives of 53 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The purpose of this seminar was to discuss the working methods used for the various CTA activities (*see below*).

Statistics

Statistics for the overall activities of the CTA at headquarters and in the field were as follows:

- 1,352,794 family messages were transmitted;
- 507,974 names were received and recorded;
- 84,060 requests for inquiries into the whereabouts of missing persons were received, including 11,797 persons reported missing following the Second World War;
- 39,310 cases, some initiated in 1982 and some carried over from previous years, were resolved; these included 24,588 "positive" replies transmitted to the enquirers, i.e. the fate of the missing person was ascertained;
- 65,534 capture cards were made out;
- 3,784 certificates were delivered;
- 591 travel documents were issued.

The fact that the CTA was once again able to carry out successfully the numerous tasks requested of it was partly due to the valuable co-operation of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and of the various organizations assisting refugees.

International technical seminar

In a report submitted to the International Red Cross Conference at Manila in November 1981, the ICRC and the League had drawn the attention of National Societies to the importance of their tracing services and to the need to co-ordinate working methods. They had also reminded governments of their obligations under the Geneva Conventions to set up a national Information Bureau in the event of conflict, or, better still, in peacetime, as an official agency to work in conjunction with the CTA. It was with this in view, and bearing in mind its responsibilities vis-à-vis National Societies as coordinator and technical adviser, that the CTA organized its first international technical seminar in Geneva from 4 to 10 November, which was attended by 61 participants representing the following 53 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, People's Republic of China, Colombia, People's Republic of the Congo, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Macao, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States and USSR.

The seminar gave tracing services the opportunity of better recognizing their mutual problems and showed the need for closer co-ordination in this sphere. The participants invited the ICRC to collaborate with the National Societies in drawing the governments' attention to the importance of setting up national Information Bureaus as a means of protection, and of their obligation to do so as States parties to the Geneva Conventions. They also encouraged the CTA to promote the tracing activities of National Societies by preparing a technical manual, organizing regional seminars and placing experts at their disposal, and recommended it, in co-operation with the League, to call on the experience of National Societies.

Furthermore, a number of National Society representatives met informally, as a sideline to the seminar, to discuss two subjects not on the agenda: "Tracing in the event of natural disasters" and "Tracing of a social nature". In addition, the representatives of the National Societies principally affected by the reception of South East Asian refugees spent a whole day discussing their mutual problems, in the presence of CTA delegates.

TMS working group

From 21 to 25 June, two CTA representatives took part in the meeting of a "Tracing and Mailing Service" (TMS) working group, which was organized in Manila by the Philippine Red Cross. It may be recalled that the TMS was set up in 1979 under the auspices of the ICRC to meet the specific needs of the Vietnamese refugees arriving by boat along the coasts of South East Asian countries (*see also chapter "Refugees in South East Asia"*).

Development of activities and staff

In 1982, the CTA endeavoured to become more fully integrated in the ICRC's "Operational activities" unit, following the structural reorganization at the beginning of the year. Particular emphasis was placed on the further training of CTA personnel to enable them to carry out more diversified activities.

In addition, the CTA began a decentralisation programme giving greater autonomy in handling cases to tracing agencies in the field. It also undertook an in-depth study on the standardization of working methods, a particularly important subject in the context of the technical seminar organized in Geneva in November (*see above*). On a technical level, the use of data processing is becoming more and more widespread at the CTA; practically, all the data relating to current conflicts are now computerized, so that additional specialized staff have had to be engaged.

Finally, the CTA set up a service to undertake an on-going study of problems such as its criteria for action, its activities on behalf of refugees and missing persons (relations with National Societies and international organizations) and its working methods.

On 31 December 1982, the CTA had 114 staff members at headquarters and 32 delegates divided between the twenty tracing agencies in the field, assisted by 92 locally recruited employees.

(*For the activities of tracing agencies in the field, see the chapter "Operational activities" in this Report.*)

RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The ICRC continued to maintain close contact, both in New York and Geneva, with the United Nations Organization and its specialized agencies, through its International Organizations Division.

ICRC staff attended the thirty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights, in February-March, in Geneva. Likewise, the two annual sessions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), held in April in New York and in July in Geneva, were closely followed by ICRC observers.

ICRC representatives also attended the annual session of the Sub-Commission to combat discrimination and for the protection of minorities, from 16 August to 10 September in Geneva.

The thirty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, held in New York from 21 September to 21 December, provided the opportunity for numerous contacts on questions of common interest, both as regards operational activities as well as in the spheres of human rights and international humanitarian law.

In addition, the head of the International Organizations Division and the New York-based delegate maintained regular contact with representatives of governments which contribute to the humanitarian work carried out by the ICRC and other organizations in Kampuchea and Thailand. They also took part in the meetings of the agencies concerned by the situation brought about by the events which started in Lebanon in June.

Contacts were maintained and developed with regional organizations. The ICRC was represented at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), in February in Addis Ababa, and attended the session

of the Permanent Commission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on 2 July in Dublin. The delegate to the international organizations in New York went to Washington to attend the twelfth General Assembly of the Organization of American States, from 18 to 20 November.

Members of the International Organizations Division, often assisted by staff of other interested ICRC services, took part in numerous other meetings, of which the following should be mentioned:

- the special meeting of the Co-ordination Office of the Non-Aligned Countries, from 5 to 8 April in Kuwait;
- the thirty-fifth session of the World Health Assembly, in May in Geneva;
- the annual session of the Administrative Council of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in May in New York;
- various seminars on problems of international humanitarian law, refugees and civil rights at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, San Remo; the International Human Rights Institute, Strasbourg; Yale University; Nova University, Port Lauderdale, Florida; and in Stockholm and Cairo;
- the International Peace Academy, on procedures of negotiation and good offices;
- the thirty-third session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, from 11 to 20 October in Geneva;
- the forty-eighth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, from 16 to 17 November in Geneva;
- the United Nations Conference for Assistance to Chad, from 29 to 30 November in Geneva.