

**Zeitschrift:** Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross  
**Herausgeber:** International Committee of the Red Cross  
**Band:** - (1981)  
  
**Rubrik:** Central Tracing Agency

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# CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

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The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) of the ICRC was constantly occupied during the year, both at headquarters and in the field, with continuing conflicts and with the consequences of previous conflicts and situations of internal disturbances and tensions. It was also confronted by the numerous tasks resulting from such tragic problems as those of the "boat people" (see p. 38 under "Refugees in South-East Asia") and of persons displaced by events within their own countries or along the borders of neighbouring countries.

During the year, the CTA in Geneva received or dispatched about 61,000 letters relating to the enormous field of activities assigned to it by the Geneva Conventions or to tasks resulting from the exercise by the ICRC of its right of humanitarian initiative: registration of data concerning prisoners of war, civilian internees and political detainees; transmission of family messages and news between persons separated by events or between prisoners and their relatives; tracing of missing persons, organization of family reunions, transfers and repatriations; provision of travel documents; issue of certificates of captivity, death, sickness, etc.

The total correspondence reported above was lower than that of the preceding year (92,000 letters), due in part to the fact that all the activities carried out for displaced persons in Thailand were transferred, for purposes of decentralization, to the ICRC delegation in Bangkok and in part to the natural reduction in requests relating to the consequences of the Second World War. The distribution according to the nature of activities was as follows:

- after-effects of the Second World War 28%
- after-effects of conflicts subsequent to the Second World War and conflicts still continuing 26%
- "political" detainees 12%
- refugees and displaced persons 34%

## Statistics

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

- about 2,229,000 names were received and recorded;
- about 805,700 family messages (Red Cross forms and regular mail) were transmitted, with some 620,700 relating to South-East Asia;
- Nearly 34,900 investigations were instituted following requests for the tracing of missing persons (*see box on the procedure for carrying out such investigations*);
- 15,100 cases, some instituted during 1981 and some carried over from previous years, were resolved;
- 2,665 certificates were delivered;
- 455 travel documents were issued.

## Development of technical resources

**DATA PROCESSING** – In 1981, the computer system installed at CTA headquarters stored all of the data available about the "boat people" in South-East Asia. Thanks to the new possibilities for the identification and localization of

### HOW A CTA INVESTIGATION PROCEEDS

When the CTA in Geneva receives a *tracing request* for a missing person or for members of a family separated by a conflict or by internal disorders or tensions – and it receives scores of them every day from every part of the world – it opens a *dossier* in which all information about the case will be brought together and filed.

The *investigation* then proceeds, in two places:

- at headquarters, where the basis of the work is a huge file index – consisting of 55 million individual record cards – showing names of prisoners of war, detainees, missing persons and refugees, on the basis of information from a variety of official and private sources;
- in the «field», mainly through the tracing agencies attached to ICRC delegations, but also through the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and various other appropriate organs, such as the International Tracing Service at Arolsen (see p. 45), the HCR, etc.

The case is *closed* when the person sought is found or when his fate is ascertained. It remains *in suspense* when none of the enquiries has led to any result (these enquiries may go on for several years or even for tens of years), and continues to be registered and controlled by the CTA, in the hope that information subsequently received will enable it to be closed.

In essence, the CTA is the meeting place of two currents: the flow of requests for which it institutes enquiries, and the flow of information which it reports back to the applicants. At the junction of these two currents is documentation – for everything that passes through the hands of the CTA leaves a trace which may become the source of new information.

persons, the CTA was able to increase the services provided to the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the countries of asylum or resettlement.

**MICROFILMING** – In its continuing programme of micro-filming old archives, nearly 14 million documents, including 12.5 million individual cards from both World Wars, were put on film in 1981. This programme, begun in 1979, is designed to ensure the permanent preservation of highly valued documents, to save space in CTA headquarters.

#### **Role of the CTA as co-ordinator and technical adviser to National Societies and governments**

To give wider effect to its experience, covering more than a century, and to the knowledge recently gained in the field, especially through the action for the benefit of refugees in South-East Asia, the CTA stepped up its efforts to encourage National Societies to set up their own tracing services, offering its technical assistance to help them do so. In a report submitted to the International Red Cross Conference at Manila, it drew the attention of the National Societies to the importance of their tracing services and to the need to co-ordinate working methods. It also reminded governments of their obligation under the Geneva Conventions, in the event of conflict, to set up National Information Bureaus, to serve as interlocutors with the CTA. Such bureaus, which should best be established in times of peace, could be operated by the respective National Societies.

With this in view, and conscious of its responsibilities as co-ordinator and technical adviser, the CTA invited all National Societies which already had tracing services to attend a seminar scheduled for November 1982 in Geneva. The purpose of this meeting is to define the various tasks incumbent upon the National Information Bureaus, the National Societies and the CTA and to harmonize their working procedures.

The National Societies which do not yet have tracing services could in due course benefit from a CTA training system.

#### **Co-operation with National Societies and participation in meetings**

Throughout the year, the CTA maintained and developed its relations with the National Societies. At the invitation of the Swedish Red Cross, it took part in a meeting in Stockholm in February, in connection with the National Information Bureau which was then being set up. On that occasion contacts were made with representatives of the Norwegian and Danish National Societies. Visits were also made to the headquarters of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn (in August) and to the British Red Cross in London (also in August). In September, the CTA took part in a round table conference on tracing problems, organized at The Hague by the Netherlands Red Cross. Two representatives of the CTA visited the Soviet Union (in September), at the invitation of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

In addition, the CTA was represented at several international meetings dealing with problems concerning refugees, notably those organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, and Social Service International. It also participated in a round table meeting in London on the psycho-social problems of refugees, convoked by the Permanent Conference on Refugees.

#### **Reorganization and staff of the CTA**

Development of the activities of the CTA necessitated a reorganization of its internal administration for better co-ordination with other units of the ICRC, tracing agencies in the field and National Societies. The various areas of intervention were regrouped in three divisions: Europe/North America, Africa/Middle East, and Asia/Latin America, each one under the direction of a division head. A new Director, Mr. François Perez, was appointed, to replace Mr. Ulrich Wasser, who was to leave the ICRC on 31 January 1982.

As of 31 December, the CTA had 101 staff members at headquarters and 26 delegates in the field, assisted by 180 locally recruited employees. (*For the activities of tracing agencies in the field, see Activities throughout the World in this Report.*)