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ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The Department of Organization and Information Systems manages the technical resources used to handle information and oversees the institution's working methods. It has four divisions (archives, information and document systems, computer and telecommunications) and an Organization Service.

The ICRC adopted an archive policy on 10 May 1990 whereby decentralization is to result in restructured activities in the coming 10 years.

The Archives Division's 1990 achievements are perhaps best expressed in figures: new material from headquarters and the delegations totalled 165 linear metres (up 4.4%), while 37 linear metres of material no longer of any use were destroyed. Also, 75 organizations and individuals from outside the ICRC applied for permission to consult the archives.

Work progressed throughout the year on a dozen data banks started in 1988 on internal matters (official decisions, policy documents and questions of law, contacts with the outside, etc.) and external information (library and audiovisual resources, texts on international humanitarian law, ICRC public statements, etc.).

In 1990, routine organization tasks were maintained, and, in an effort to rationalize, a summarized collection was drawn up of different procedures and guidelines used at headquarters. New computer applications were also implemented for the treatment of operational data, and in particular a standardized application was introduced for the Central Tracing Agency. Finally, a pilot local network was set up at the Computer Division, to pave the way for the installation in 1991 of similar networks both at headquarters and in the field.

Telecommunications network

The ICRC's shortwave telecommunications network — one of the most extensive non-governmental networks in the world — provides headquarters in Geneva and the delegations and sub-delegations in the field with an efficient and reliable means of communication. Entirely independent of commercial channels, the network enables radio contact to be maintained round-the-clock in situations where, more often than not, official channels have been disrupted or no longer function.

In 1990, the ICRC had 103 HF stations, 33 in contact with Geneva and 70 as part of local networks in the field. Six bases were opened during the year, in south-eastern Angola (Jamba), Cambodia (Phnom Penh), Honduras (Tegucigalpa), Liberia (Monrovia), Nigeria (Lagos) and Peru (Lima). A total of 143,818 messages were transmitted (43,817 by radio), an increase of 31.6% over 1989.

Finally, since October 1990 the ICRC has been using the INMARSAT satellite telecommunications system, which allows direct communication and the exchange of telephone, telex and telefax messages via a coast earth station. This new technology is invaluable in an emergency, as was the case in the Middle East, and functions as a back-up for the ICRC's traditional radio network.