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II. CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

The Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC (CTA), created in 1870, fulfils the mandate entrusted, in times of conflict, to the two central information agencies provided for under Article 123 of the Third Convention and Article 140 of the Fourth Convention of 1949. In particular, the CTA has the duty to obtain, centralize and communicate all necessary information on captives and the dead, to undertake searches to find out what has happened to military personnel and civilians reported missing, and to establish an exchange of news between close relatives who find it impossible to correspond by the normal channels of communication.

Moreover, on the basis of the documentation held centrally for many years, the Agency is able to supply attestations of captivity, sickness or death.

In addition, the CTA is closely associated with the humanitarian work performed by the ICRC during internal armed conflicts or crises, making the maximum effort to obtain news of persons reported missing or deprived of their liberty.

During 1977 the Central Tracing Agency received 59,266 letters and sent out 65,024 replies. It also recorded and entered on index cards 110,000 new items of data.

While the figures above, which incidentally relate only to the work done at ICRC headquarters, show a reduction as compared with the previous year, there has been no slackening in the Agency's activities. The decrease, in fact, was due mainly to the smaller number of family messages to be forwarded and of searches to be initiated for persons recently listed as missing.

By contrast, the majority of cases dealt with during the year—more than 50,000—were extremely complex. While the acute phase of any conflict usually brings a flood of urgent requests that are relatively simple to solve, the aftermath of war and disturbances gives rise to a long sequence of cases as painful as they are delicate, which the Agency must continue to work on. This applies particularly to the question of reuniting families.

Lebanon

The activities in connection with events in Lebanon remained considerable throughout the year. The Agency in Geneva dealt with about 1,700 cases and sent more than 1,900 messages; the Agency's offices in Beirut, Jounieh, Tripoli, and Syria, had to face a much heavier task (see page 7).

Sequels of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries

In collaboration with the ICRC delegations in Amman, Damascus, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Gaza and Cairo, the CTA

pursued its work in aid of families split up as a result of all the conflicts that have gone on in that part of the world. For example, more than 14,000 family messages were exchanged, 3,300 of them through Geneva. The Tracing Agency also acted as an intermediary in sending visiting permits, birth and wedding certificates and educational diplomas.

Western Sahara

During the past year, the CTA, with the help of the National Societies concerned, has arranged for the exchange of 5,200 messages between captives held by different parties to the conflict and their families. The Agency has also forwarded, through the Moroccan Red Crescent, about 400 parcels from Algerian families for their relatives held prisoner in Morocco. In addition, searches were undertaken to obtain news of missing persons.

Ogaden conflict

Despite the fierce fighting which took place in the region, the CTA received only a very small number of notifications of capture or requests for news.

Southern Africa

The CTA also entered in its files the information relating to detainees visited by ICRC delegates.

It also forwarded letters between Cuban prisoners of war in South Africa and their families.

Angola

The CTA continued to receive requests concerning persons who had not been heard from since the Angola war. Thanks chiefly to the Angolan Red Cross Society, now being formed, the Agency was able to close a certain number of files.

It took charge of forwarding mail for South African prisoners of war in Angola.

Indo-China

Many requests came to the CTA from Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees who wished to get in touch with members of their family who had remained behind or to arrange for their close relatives to join them.

From the extensive documentation in its possession, the Agency was also able to establish files for foreign residents in Viet Nam and so to facilitate their repatriation. Owing to the often conflicting information supplied by the persons themselves and the complexity of the family groups, made up of members with different national origins, the work of compiling the files was unusually arduous. The files were then sent to the Agency's office attached to the ICRC delegation in Bangkok and responsible for making the appropriate arrangements.

Iran

Subsequent to the two series of visits made in May and October 1977 by the ICRC delegates to places of detention in Iran, the CTA noted in its records many thousands of items of information relating to the detainees visited.

Latin America

As in past years, the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva has entered in its records information relating to detainees visited by ICRC delegates in various Latin American countries and to persons reported to the Agency as missing.

Among the 19,500 index cards made out during 1977, a certain number dealt with migrants, whose departure for another country was kindly notified to the Agency by the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).

During the year, the CTA in Geneva processed one thousand requests for news or for families to be reunited.

The Agency's office located at the ICRC delegation's headquarters in Buenos Aires dealt with about 2,500 requests concerning detainees and persons reported missing.

THE ICRC TRAVEL DOCUMENT

The travel document issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was created in February 1945. It is intended for use by displaced persons, stateless persons and refugees who have no proper identification papers and are thus unable to return to their own country or the country of residence, or to travel to a country of their choice which is willing to receive them.

The ICRC created the travel document on the basis of the right it possesses to take such an initiative under the Statutes of the International Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions. The establishment of this document, which filled a need, was and still is welcomed by the many States who are called upon to provide the necessary visas.

Since 1945, more than 500,000 displaced or stateless persons or refugees holding an ICRC travel document were able to go to the country of their choice, thanks to the understanding of the government authorities concerned.

In order to ensure that this type of document cannot be forged or tampered with, the Central Tracing Agency has had a new set of documents printed on a water-marked paper, the texture of which contains several security features.

All the work connected with the travel document is carried out by computer, whether checking the use made of the documents, recording the identity of the persons to whom they have been issued during recent years or verifying if the documents issued have been returned to the Agency after the holders have reached their destination.

In 1977, more than 700 travel documents were issued to persons leaving South-East Asia and Latin America.

The office set up by the Agency in 1973 in Santiago, Chile (see page 26) continued its activities on a reduced scale, owing to the reduction in the number of persons in detention. The activities comprised: making lists of detainees to be visited, bringing these lists up to date after visits had been made, undertaking searches as a result of requests, deciding on the action to be taken to help detainees and their families to resolve their problems, and to enable families to be reunited in another country.

Consequences of former conflicts

Various sectors of the CTA responsible for dealing with cases arising out of the Second World War still maintain a steady activity. Those who fought in the conflict between 1939 and 1945, or their widows, have now reached or are about to reach retiring age. To obtain an increase in their old-age pension, or to be allowed to retire early, they often have to produce evidence of captivity, hospitalization or, in the case of widows, the death or disappearance of the spouse during the war.

This means that the Central Tracing Agency still receives thousands of applications of this kind, either directly from the persons concerned or from the authorities or the Red Cross

Society in their countries. The requests come mainly from countries which, due to the events of the war, usually enemy occupation, possess only scant documentation on those of their nationals, civilian or military, captured by enemy forces or deceased during hostilities.

The Polish Service of the CTA received 16,277 requests during 1977. With the aid of extra staff, the backlog of the previous year was overcome and 26,586 letters were sent out.

Though their volume of work was not as large as that of the Polish Service, the German, Italian, Yugoslav and Soviet Services saw no diminution of their activities in comparison with 1976.

The consequences of the Second World War affect others besides former prisoners. Many people forced by events to leave their homes during or immediately after the war are still trying to find out what happened to their families, and if possible to get in touch with them. Searches carried out in close collaboration with the National Societies and with the International Tracing Service in Arolsen (see below) enable the CTA to discover the whereabouts of some persons and thus start the process of reuniting members of a family.

Once again the Central Tracing Agency has fulfilled the numerous duties entrusted to it, thanks in part to the valuable help from National Red Cross Societies and from various organizations which give aid to refugees.

III. INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

The International Tracing Service (ITS) at Arolsen, in the Federal Republic of Germany, has been under the direction of the ICRC since 1955.

At the end of the Second World War, the Allied Powers decided to collect together at Arolsen all the documents relating to the concentration camps and displaced persons in Germany. Until 1954, the service was administered by the Allied High Commission for Germany.

In 1955, the Governments of France, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the United Kingdom and the United States asked the ICRC, as a neutral body, to take over the administration and management of the ITS. Agreements on the subject were signed and on the basis of these the ICRC has directed the institution for the last 22 years, and the Federal German Government has covered the cost of ITS activities. In 1977, the sum involved was 7,259,102 DM. The number of ITS staff was about 250.

Also in 1955, an International Commission for the International Tracing Service (ICITS) was constituted, composed of representatives of the four Governments already mentioned, and those of the Governments of Belgium, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, which had shown evidence of their interest in the ITS. The Commission reviews the work of the Service and meets periodically to make recommendations.

Nowadays, the word "tracing" is misleading. At the end of the war, the chief function of the ITS was to search, in Germany and in the countries that had been occupied by German troops, for persons who had been captured or displaced and to reunite separated families. Later, its activities changed and they now consist essentially in gathering, classifying, storing and using the documents relating to Germans and non-Germans who were held in the Nazi labour or concentration camps and to non-German persons displaced as a result of the war. The actual