

Central Tracing Agency

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CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

As the successor to the Central Tracing Agency for Prisoners of War which through two World Wars rendered incalculable humanitarian service, the ICRC Central Tracing Agency (CTA) in 1983 continued its intense activity to fulfil its treaty obligations *vis-à-vis* civilian and military victims of armed conflicts (prisoners of war, civilian internees), and tasks arising from the ICRC's right of humanitarian initiative (registering of "political" detainees and displaced civilians, tracing missing persons, reuniting dispersed families, issuing ICRC travel documents).

Since the CTA has to deal with particularly complex situations and needs to obtain results rapidly, it increasingly uses modern data-processing techniques: practically all the data relating to current conflicts are now computerized, making the work more efficient. It is also experimenting with the use of microcomputers in the field.

Statistics

Statistics for the overall activities of the CTA in 1983 were as follows:

- about 2,665,000 messages were transmitted, i.e. a million more than last year. 466,376 of these messages consisted of correspondence exchanged between the prisoners of the Ansar camp (southern Lebanon) and their families;
- 313,000 fresh items of information concerning prisoners of war, civilian internees and political detainees were received and recorded;
- nearly 79,000 requests were received for the tracing of missing persons, family reuniting, emigration, certificates and various forms of assistance; 12,900 of these were connected with the Second World War;
- 45,300 enquiries were conducted to satisfy requests for information concerning a missing person or members of a

family separated because of a conflict, internal tension or unrest; 23,700 of these cases were resolved;

- 22,800 capture cards were made out;
- 6,900 certificates of captivity, sickness, death, etc. were issued;
- 1,155 travel documents were issued.

Relations with National Societies

As in previous years, the CTA maintained its ties with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, either to encourage them to set up tracing services within their Society with its technical help, or to discuss and standardize working methods. For this, various CTA staff members visited the Finnish, Swedish, British, French, Greek and Italian Red Cross Societies. Furthermore, the CTA was represented at the fourth seminar on Tracing and Mailing Services of the National Societies of South-East Asia which was held in Kuala Lumpur from 26 to 29 September.

The CTA also prepared a manual on the standardization of working methods in accordance with the recommendations made by the Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing services at the seminar held in Geneva in November 1982 (see *Annual Report 1982*). The edition for National Societies and international organizations will be published in 1984.

Personnel

On 31 December, the CTA had 110 staff members at its headquarters and 27 delegates in the field, assisted by 125 locally recruited staff (see chapter "Operational Activities" for the activities of the tracing agencies in the field).