

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1956)

Rubrik: Traditional forms of assistance to the victims of conflicts and their after-effects

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 06.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

II. TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ASSISTANCE TO THE VICTIMS OF CONFLICTS AND THEIR AFTER-EFFECTS

As in previous years, the ICRC has relieved distress with the means at its disposal in Geneva and in the delegations, and by making use of the powerful and efficient machinery of the *Central Prisoners of War Agency* (Geneva, Switzerland), and the *International Tracing Service* (Arolsen, Germany) ¹. This work was carried out in close co-operation with the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies.

CENTRAL PRISONERS OF WAR AGENCY ²

The Agency, re-opened in 1939, held 47,000,000 individual cards by December 31, 1956. Many of the cards concern the same person; the number of cases exceeded 15,000,000.

In the course of 1956 the Central Prisoners of War Agency received 75,013 postal items representing some 90,00 cases, and sent out 88,146 over the same period.

¹ A detailed report on the work of the *Central Prisoners of War Agency* and the *International Tracing Service* was given in the Annual Report for 1955 (pp. 8 to 12).

² The Agency took the place of the various Bureaux and Agencies opened by the ICRC during previous conflicts : International Information and Relief Agency for the Wounded and Sick, Basle, 1870; Trieste Agency, 1877; Belgrade Agency, 1912; International Prisoners of War Agency, Geneva, 1914.

This correspondence led to the opening of 19,432 enquiries on missing military personnel and civilians with the authorities concerned (National Red Cross Societies, ministries and register offices, particularly local ones).

The amount of mail received by the Central Agency in 1956 was twice the 1955 total. The staff was called upon to make a great effort, especially on account of the events in Suez and Hungary which made it necessary to open three new card-indexes, i.e.—

1. *Census of Hungarian refugees*
(160,000 index cards)
2. *Prisoners of war and missing persons of the Suez conflict*
(10,550 index-cards representing about 5,000 cases)
3. *Stateless persons obliged to leave Egypt*
(4,082 cards).

As regards the Hungarian refugees, the ICRC received about 100 requests for information per day, and was able to reply immediately to half of them, by tallying the cards made out each day.

International Tracing Service. — The ITS, founded in 1944, and under the International Committee's direction since June 6, 1955, continued its heavy task which was described in detail in the previous Annual Report. The following figures will give an idea of the magnitude of its work in 1956 : on December 31, 1956, the ITS held 25,000,000 index-cards representing about 8,000,000 individual cases.

During the year it received 158,079 enquiries, an increase of 20,472 on the number received in 1955 (137,607); this total includes—

— 95,680 applications for certificates of captivity or assigned residence, in order to obtain compensation (77,907 in 1955) ¹;

¹ Under the terms of a new German law concerning compensation for the victims of the National-Socialist regime, the time-limit for submitting applications for compensation has been extended for one year ending October 1, 1957.

- 39,572 requests for enquiries concerning persons deported or who suffered racial persecution, and refugees (41,498 in 1955);
- 22,591 requests for attestations of deaths (17,944 in 1955);
- 236 requests for historical or statistical information (258 in 1955).

The number of attestations and other documents despatched amounted to 236,523, which was practically the same as for 1955 and consisted of—

- 129,611 letters concerning requests for certificates of captivity and assigned residence (144,527 in 1955), including 23,617 actual certificates of captivity and 29,045 certificates of assigned residence, from applicants in Germany (60.5%), the United States (12.1%), Israel (17%) and Italy (3.3%). More than half the German cases concerned applications for compensation from persons residing outside Germany and the United States cases were more specially concerned with refugees and displaced persons who had taken up residence in the United States.
- 105,107 replies to enquiries concerning interned, persecuted and displaced persons or refugees (90,245 in 1955), of which 22,194 gave the information requested, 30,486 asked the enquirer to wait while the information was being sought and 52,427 were negative.
- 1538 attestations of death (3178 in 1955).
- 267 replies to requests for historical or statistical information (219 in 1955).

The ITS continued the checking of documents collected during the year in connection with concentration camps (over 125,000 names) and information collected after the Second World War (over 100,000 names) received from the World Jewish Congress.

In accordance with the agreement concluded between the German Federal Republic, the former occupying Powers and the ICRC, the ITS was to make a new inventory of its archives; in 1956 three quarters of the inventory of documents concerning

concentration camps was completed; the remaining quarter was nearly finished at the close of the year.

It is interesting to note these results, which are a proof of the International Tracing Service's activity, and can be considered as satisfactory.

The International Commission of the ITS met on five occasions in 1956. It included a representative of each of the Governments who signed the Bonn Agreement: France, Belgium, Germany, Israel, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as representatives of the Greek Government (since June 1956), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the ITS and the ICRC.

The presence of delegates of the Geneva institution on the directorate of the Arolsen organisation is a reliable means of ensuring unity of thought and of action.

Implementation of Article 16 of the Peace Treaty with Japan. —

In accordance with Article 16 of the San Francisco Treaty of September 8, 1951, the ICRC is to determine the portion of the Japanese funds which will be allocated to each of the Allied Powers for the compensation of former prisoners of war in Japanese hands who suffered excessive hardship during their captivity. In each case the amount has to be calculated in direct proportion to the total number of prisoners of each nationality, and the ICRC had requested the States concerned to send it complete lists, so that a first payment could be made. Unfortunately the checking of lists in 1956 revealed fairly numerous errors. It was therefore decided to make a careful examination of the lists by using the perforated card system of the International Business Machines Corporation, which automatically reveals repetitions in names by means of the information contained in the card-index of the Central Prisoners of War Agency. In some countries, the ICRC asked its delegates to make checks on the spot in conjunction with the national services.

It is obvious that the checking of tens of thousands of names takes considerable time. It appeared to be unfair, however,

to postpone the distribution of compensation in countries which had supplied accurate lists, and with which an agreement had been reached on the distribution methods to be used. The ICRC therefore suggested that it should proceed with the first distribution, wherever it was possible to do so, and to hand over to the national agencies of eleven countries the amounts due to them and to set aside the shares accruing to three countries. On November 8, 1956, in London, this suggestion was adopted by all the representatives of the beneficiary Powers.

The shares handed over to eleven countries, calculated on the basis of 154,927 former prisoners of war, amounted to 1,912,380 pounds sterling and 5,349,629 US dollars¹. The funds held in reserve, calculated on the basis of 64,558 former prisoners of war amount at present to 796,887 pounds sterling and 2,229,187.74 US dollars.

By the time this report is published the majority of the beneficiaries in the countries participating in the first distribution will probably have received the share to which they are entitled.

CERTIFICATES OF CAPTIVITY. — As a result of the entry into force in the territory of the German Federal Republic of a law for the payment of compensation to former German prisoners of war, since March 1955 the *Central Agency for Prisoners of War* has received an ever increasing number of requests for certificates of captivity.

These applications come from public relief offices entrusted with the payment of this compensation, calculated in proportion to the time passed in captivity, with the exception of periods during which the person concerned was in paid employment as a civilian worker. The main difficulty encountered by the public authorities is to ascertain whether the former prisoner enjoyed the status of a civilian worker and, if so, to know the exact dates of the beginning and end of his employment. It has once again been seen that the ICRC is in a position to help

¹ Payments are made in equal parts in the two currencies (pounds sterling and US dollars), payments to the ICRC having been made on the same basis.

the authorities concerned in their work by means of the information contained in the card-indexes of the Central Prisoners of War Agency.

OTHER ACTIVITIES. — The Central Agency has continued to analyse, register and transmit lists of releases and repatriation, to reply to requests for the opening of enquiries, to make out attestations and certificates and to forward family messages.

Through its delegates, the ICRC has again visited camps, hospitals and other places of detention in the various countries where prisoners of war are held, particularly in the Near East ¹.

War Disabled. — In 1956 the ICRC also gave assistance to the war disabled. A few examples of *collective assistance* in this field, in the Far East and Central and Southern Europe, are given below :

In *Viet Nam*, the need of artificial limbs for the war disabled has been mentioned in the ICRC delegates' reports. After discussions with the Ministère des anciens combattants, it was agreed that the ICRC should set up a workshop for the manufacture of artificial limbs in Saigon, provided with the necessary tools and a stock of " standard " peg legs which could be adjusted to fit each particular case. The workshop was set up with the assistance of the ICRC Delegation, and two British technicians were sent to Saigon to instruct the Viet Nam personnel which, after three months' apprenticeship, was able to continue the work under the direct supervision of the Ministère des anciens combattants of the Republic of Viet Nam. This undertaking, carried out under the best possible conditions, is now making progress with the assistance of the World Veterans Federation.

In *Indonesia*, the ICRC also assisted the war-blinded by sending Braille watches to a home for the blind at Bandung.

In the *German Federal Republic*, the purchase and delivery of 80 invalid chairs for disabled, amputated or paralysed

¹ See *Table of visits to places of detention*.

“ Volksdeutsche ” was continued in conjunction with the German Red Cross in Bonn and its local branches.

In *Austria*, a fairly large number of disabled children and youths benefited from the assistance of the ICRC, through its Vienna Delegation. After a thorough investigation of the matter the ICRC decided to allocate the funds placed at its disposal as follows : contributions towards school or apprenticeship fees and purchase of text books; payment of cost of rest cures in convalescent homes, purchase of clothing and footwear.

In the case of *Italy*, with the funds placed at the International Committee's disposal by the Swiss Federal Council, some Italian children and youths whose eyesight was seriously impaired were given treatment at the Geneva Eye Hospital. This assistance is being continued in close cooperation with the Italian Red Cross in Rome.

As regards *individual relief actions*, during the first six months of the year the ICRC gave assistance to war disabled in particularly distressed circumstances who, for various reasons, were not being assisted in their country of residence. The gifts consisted of artificial limbs, Braille watches, medicaments, clothing and foodstuffs, distributed in nine countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland and Syria).

Training of Medical Personnel. — In 1956 the ICRC neglected no opportunity of studying, in conjunction with the League, National Red Cross Societies, Army Medical Services and other organisations concerned, questions relating to the training of medical personnel.

It prepared, for the XIXth International Red Cross Conference, a document entitled “ *Nursing duties, organisation, enrolment and training of professional and auxiliary personnel for their duties in time of war* ”, of which the various points had been the object of careful study by the doctor members of the ICRC.

The ICRC also continued to disseminate the document entitled "Training Course for Red Cross Nursing Auxiliaries and Voluntary Aids"¹. The National Societies, which are ready to carry out their humanitarian work in all circumstances, require to have, in addition to their professional staff, well-trained auxiliary personnel. In performing duties which, in accordance with Red Cross principles, are carried out for the benefit of all, without distinction, the voluntary and auxiliary personnel are a significant feature of national life. Every country should have well-trained teams of voluntary personnel at its disposal. The training course referred to above indicates in a clear and precise manner not only what the auxiliary personnel should know in order to give practical assistance to nurses in times of emergency, but also the spirit of devotion by which they must be animated if the quality of the nursing of wounded and sick is to be maintained at the highest level. This is a most important point and involves all members of the National Societies.

The training of auxiliaries and nursing aids of National Societies was again the object, during the year, of renewed contacts between the head of the ICRC Medical Personnel and War-Disablement Section² and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Army Medical Services in the Near East and, on the occasion of the Seminar on the Equality of Rights for Women in the USSR (Moscow, Sept. 15-October 1, 1956), with the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR.

Stateless Persons and Refugees. — The previous Annual Report emphasised the International Committee's activity on behalf of refugees, including children, aged persons, the sick, stateless persons from Central or Eastern Europe, persons of German origin or German-speaking (Volksdeutsche), or dispersed families (Greeks, Jugoslavs) whom the ICRC continued to assist with successful results during 1956.

¹By Miss H. Nussbaum, professional nurse, temporarily attached to the ICRC: preface by Miss L. Odier, Member of the ICRC.

²Miss A. Pfirter.

Table I

COMPARATIVE TABLE OF THE RE-UNITING OF FAMILIES
FROM 1951 TO 1956

YEAR	BENEFICIARIES (adults and children)		PROCEEDING FROM	DESTINATION
1956	<i>Greeks</i>	54	Rumania	Australia
1955		157	Poland, Rumania	Australia, Greece
1954		3,927*	{ Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland }	Greece
1953		4,611	Jugoslavia, Rumania	Greece
1952		153	Jugoslavia	Greece
1951		364	Jugoslavia	Australia, Greece
and prev.	Total as on December 31, 1956	9,266		
1956	<i>Volksdeutsche</i>	24,879	{ Austria, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Rumania, USSR }	Argentine Republic, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela
1955		15,024		
1954		12,040		
1953		12,981		
1952		7,240		
1951		61,434		
and prev.	Total as on December 31, 1956	133,598		
1956	<i>Jugoslavs</i>	900**	Reports on enquiries opened, in particular in Austria, Germany and Italy	Jugoslavia
1955				
1954				
	Total as on December 31, 1956	900		

* Including 165 former military personnel.

** The ICRC made enquiries concerning 1,209 cases; in 1955 it sent reports to the Yugoslav Red Cross on over 800 cases.

The information concerning refugees from Egypt and Hungary will be given in the next report.

The action on behalf of tuberculous refugees and their families from camps in Trieste ¹ gave the results hoped for. Of the 102 patients under treatment in Leysin, 86 were discharged from hospital as cured and four organisations (Caritas, Committee for Orthodox Refugees, the Entraide ouvrière suisse and the Mouvement chrétien pour la Paix) will henceforth continue to assist a few incurable cases. After careful negotiations, the refugees who were cured, and their families, who had been

¹ See Annual Report for 1955 (pp. 37-40).

temporarily resettled in Morzine, have now resumed a normal life in the following countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela and the United Kingdom. Negotiations are still proceeding on behalf of a few persons, temporarily resettled in Switzerland, who wish to go to Canada and the United States.

By December 31, 1956, over 142,000 members of dispersed families had been brought together again (see Table I).

With regard to "Volksdeutsche", further convoys of children were organised, with the active co-operation of the Yugoslav Red Cross, thus bringing to 2,328 the number of children who were re-united with their families in Austria, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and various overseas countries. Adult Volksdeutsche also left Yugoslavia at regular intervals in the course of the year. Czechoslovakia and Poland also authorised collective departures for the purpose of reuniting families. As a general rule, all necessary arrangements were made by the National Red Cross Societies for the journey to take place under the best possible conditions.

As is known, the ICRC also endeavours to co-ordinate and develop measures for providing refugees and migrants with *legal assistance*, in conjunction with the League, National Societies and the other governmental or non-governmental organisations which may be in a position to help solve the refugee problem.

In the course of 1956, legal assistance was discussed at conferences at which the ICRC was represented by an observer¹. At Oslo (July 1956) the International Bar Association recommended that the question should be studied by an international body, in conjunction with the ICRC. At Berlin (in March) and Vaduz (in August) the European Association for the Study of the Refugee Problem recommended the establishment of an international body for the protection of refugees and the provision of legal assistance, a task which it considered should be entrusted to a permanent organisation such as the ICRC or an international institution based on the same principles. The

¹ Mr. H. Coursier.

ICRC has continued to follow with careful attention the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and to take part in the discussions of the Working Party of the Non-Governmental Organisations concerned with the Refugee Problem, and of the religious groups (World Council of Churches, Geneva, May 1956).

PERSONS DETAINED FOR POLITICAL REASONS

The giving of assistance by the Red Cross to political detainees raises a difficult problem.

On the one hand the Red Cross must, first of all, stand apart from any intervention of a political nature (the Geneva Conventions are not, in principle, applicable to the relations between States and their own nationals) while, on the other hand, suffering comparable to that resulting from warfare, and sometimes even worse, may be endured by victims of internal disturbances. The International Red Cross Conferences have affirmed, from 1921 onwards, that it is the "right and duty" of the Red Cross to "afford relief in case of civil war and social and revolutionary disturbances". The events since then have only too fully justified the concern felt in this connection; hence the wish expressed by Professor Castberg, Head of the Norwegian Delegation to the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva in 1949, that all the humanitarian measures defined by the Fourth Geneva Convention should also be applied to nationals interned by their own Government for political reasons. Similar recommendations were made by two Commissions of Experts convened in Geneva by the ICRC in 1953 and 1955. Thanks to the understanding attitude of the governments responsible for law and order, political detainees have already been visited by the ICRC in Algeria, Cyprus, Costa Rica, Greece, Guatemala, Morocco, Nicaragua and Spain. This assistance is a guarantee that the captives are humanely treated, and conforms absolutely to Red Cross principles. It is to be hoped that the practice will become general in all circumstances in which it is necessary,

and that, little by little, a new chapter of humanitarian law will be written.

The Annual Report for 1955 described the circumstances in which the ICRC sent two missions from Geneva in 1955 to Morocco and Algeria, where its delegates visited 84 places of detention. It was, in fact, on account of events of such a serious nature as to justify the intervention of a neutral body that the ICRC performed this duty in 1956.

Algeria. — On March 26, 1956, the President of the ICRC met the French Premier in Paris, and a few days later the French Government again authorised the sending of delegates from Geneva to Algeria. From May 12 to June 28 the ICRC mission¹ to which the French authorities granted numerous practical facilities, particularly as regards transport, visited 61 assembly centres and places of detention. The delegates were able to converse without witnesses with persons in assigned residence or under prosecution as a result of the events; they were also able to distribute a few relief supplies. Whenever necessary they informed camp officials and directors of prison establishments of what they had noted in the course of their visits over a period of seven weeks in regard to improvements in the condition of detention and, as soon as they returned to Geneva, their report on the visit was immediately brought to the notice of the French Government.

Another mission was sent to Algeria in the second half of the year. From October 16 to November 3 the two delegates sent from Geneva² were able to converse with persons in assigned residence in six assembly centres and at Oran hospital, and to make a few distributions of relief supplies and sports requisites. As previously, they were given every facility in carrying out their mission and a report on their visit was handed to the French Premier in Paris on November 15.

At the same time, the ICRC has unceasingly sought to find the means (in particular through its contacts with various

¹ Mr. R. Bovey, Dr. L. Gaillard, Mr. P. Gaillard, Mr. C. Pilloud (head of the mission) and Dr. H. Willener.

² Mr. P. Gaillard and Dr. L. Gaillard.

persons) of giving the assistance of the Red Cross to French military and civilian victims of events (proposals concerning the transmission of family messages and relief parcels, and visits from the delegates of the ICRC). The ICRC is continuing its efforts in this connection.

Kenya. — At the close of 1956, the ICRC made successful representations to the British authorities. With their agreement a mission ¹ was sent to Kenya to visit the various centres where persons under prosecution or interned were held. The results of the mission, which took place early in 1957, will be described in the next Annual Report.

In 1956 the delegates of the ICRC visited 118 places of detention in ten countries (see Table II).

Table II

VISITS TO PLACES OF DETENTION IN 1956

Countries	First half-year	Second half-year	Total
NORTH AFRICA			
Algeria	61	7	68
MIDDLE EAST			
Egypt	1	18	19
Israel	—	12	12
ASIA			
Japan	1	2	3
Korea	2	—	2
Malaya	—	1	1
EUROPE			
Austria	—	1	1
Greece	3	5	8
Hungary	—	2	2
Spain	—	2	2
Total . . .	68	50	118

¹ Mr. H. P. Junod and Dr. L. Gaillard.

Table III**SUMMARY TABLE OF RELIEF SUPPLIES**

Principal relief actions classified by countries and categories of persons assisted

		Value Sw. Fr.
<i>Algeria</i>	Detainees, persons in assigned residence, victims of events and persons in distress	19,000.—
<i>Austria</i>	War-disabled, displaced persons	4,000.—
<i>Cyprus</i>	Internees	10,000.—
<i>Egypt</i>	Victims of events	245,000.—
<i>Germany</i> (Fed. Rep.)	War-disabled, displaced persons	23,000.—
<i>Greece</i>	Detainees, persons in assigned residence, victims of events and persons in distress	287,000.—
<i>Hungary</i>	Victims of events	15,058,000.—
<i>Lebanon</i>	War-disabled, refugees	13,000.—
<i>Poland</i>	War-disabled, civilian population	14,000.—
<i>U.S.S.R.</i>	Nationals of various countries	58,000.—
<i>Viet Nam</i> (Republic of)	War-disabled, civilian population	30,000.—
<i>Viet Nam</i> (Democratic Republic of)	War orphans	4,000.—
<i>Other relief actions</i>	7,000.—
	Total as on December 31, 1956	15,772,000.—

