

# Central Tracing Agency

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- Uige (formerly Carmona), Angola, traffic with Luanda
- Vouga, Angola, traffic with Luanda

Three other field stations were in operation during 1975, a fixed and a mobile station in East Timor and a fixed station at Darwin, Australia, all of which were provided to the ICRC by the Australian Red Cross.

Thus, the ICRC's radio network comprised a total of 27 stations during the year. Once again, it was proved that ICRC operations would have been seriously impeded, if not indeed paralyzed, without this vital infrastructure.

### Red Cross emergency network

Pursuant to a joint circular sent out on 29 March 1971 by the League of Red Cross Societies and the ICRC, numerous National Societies set up radio stations and obtained authorization from their governments to use frequencies assigned to the Red Cross. Thus, in addition to the ICRC stations set up around the world for its field operations, as listed above, this emergency network at the end of 1975 included stations operated by the following National Societies:

- Asuncion, Paraguay
- Bogota, Colombia
- Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany
- Delft, Netherlands
- Guatemala City, Guatemala
- La Paz, Bolivia
- Lima, Peru
- Madrid, Spain
- Managua, Nicaragua
- Manila, Philippines
- Nassau, Bahamas
- Panama City, Panama
- Port-au-Prince, Haiti
- Quito, Ecuador
- Sanaa, Yemen Arab Republic
- San José, Costa Rica
- San Salvador, El Salvador
- Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- Vienna, Austria

Two other National Societies were granted call signals and authorization to establish stations, but had not yet obtained their equipment at the end of the year: Bridgetown, Barbados, and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

## II. CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

The upheavals in Vietnam and Cambodia, in Angola in the spring and in Lebanon and Timor during the summer, added to the work resulting from other recent conflicts—the Middle East, India-Pakistan, Chile and Cyprus, not forgetting the continuing consequences of such events as World War II—bringing particularly intense pressure to bear upon the ICRC Central Tracing Agency, both at headquarters and in the field.

A single figure may serve to show the magnitude of the work in 1975: a total of 210,000 incoming and outgoing messages at Geneva alone—an average of 840 per working day; handled by a regular staff of 40 persons, increased to 55 during the most intense period of the conflicts in Indo-China.

### Indo-China—150,000 individual records

The Asian sector undoubtedly produced the most sustained field activity for the CTA. From the beginning of April the Agency prepared to deal with the considerable increase in work which was to come with the end of fighting in Cambodia on 17 April, and in Vietnam on 30 April.

From mid-April onward, an Agency specialist sent from Geneva to South Vietnam tried to estimate the proportions of the "tracing problem" resulting from the flight southwards of tens of thousands of civilians seeking escape from combat zones. He soon realized that the situation was too turbulent to initiate Agency activity in the countless camps for displaced persons which were hastily set up, mainly on the outskirts of Saigon and Vung Tau.

Agency efforts were therefore concentrated in countries outside the Indo-Chinese fighting areas, in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, to which thousands of refugees were fleeing. Two specialist delegates shared the task of registering them, with the assistance of the National Societies and local authorities. Travel documents were given to those who had found countries of asylum but who lacked identity papers.

Another centre of concentration for the refugees was on the island of Guam, but registration here was carried out by the American authorities and the American Red Cross. An ICRC delegate here provided travel documents to some of the refugees.

The Agency faced its greatest problem in Thailand. Some 60,000 refugees had come for temporary asylum, from Cambodia, Laos and even from Vietnam. The ICRC bureau in Bangkok was reinforced by Agency specialists who systematically registered the names of refugees in all the camps in Thailand.

At the end of 1975, this ad hoc register listed the names of more than 52,000 persons out of the total of 60,000, a figure which included those listed in the other countries mentioned above.

In Geneva, the register was supplemented at the end of 1975 by a computerized list from the American Red Cross of 80,000 persons who had already arrived in the United States, and by the names of another 10,300 refugees reported by the National Societies of twelve other countries which had granted them permanent asylum.

In Thailand, the specialist delegates had other tasks than the registration of refugees. During the autumn, they went to work at the job of reuniting families whose members were in different camps. This was only getting under way when the Thailand authorities started the construction of new and more comfortable camps. The resulting movements of refugees delayed the project, but it was not abandoned.

A total of more than 150,000 names of Indo-Chinese refugees were added to the main register of the Central Tracing Agency.

### **Saigon-Hô Chi Minh—registration of foreigners**

With the establishment of the Republic of South Vietnam on 30 April, many foreign nationals suddenly found themselves without any diplomatic representatives, as most of the consulates and embassies had closed.

These foreigners sought assistance and advice from the ICRC delegation in Saigon-Hô Chi Minh, which took their names and handed the resulting lists to the new authorities, who set up a special committee to deal with the problem of foreigners.

The same lists were sent to the Agency in Geneva, which forwarded them to the respective countries of origin of these persons. The lists rendered great service at the end of the year in preparing for the repatriation of foreigners who wished to leave Vietnam.

In addition, this registration enabled the Agency to answer about 2,000 of the 6,000 requests for news of foreigners in Vietnam.

### **Cambodia—temporary suspension**

The activities of the Agency which started in Cambodia in December 1972 came to an end on 17 April 1975, along with all the other international Red Cross activities in that country.

The Cambodia file drawn up in co-operation with the National Society—and which did not include Cambodians listed in other countries—consisted of some 80,000 index cards at the time of the shutdown in April. By that time, 10,000 requests for the tracing of missing persons had been received and 530 persons sought by their families had been found.

It must be borne in mind that in the conflict between revolutionary forces and the regime in Phnom Penh the ICRC had been able to function only on one side.

### **Angola**

Along with the establishment of an ICRC delegation in Angola on 11 June, the Central Tracing Agency sent a specialist to arrange for a tracing service in that country.

An Agency bureau was soon set up at the delegation headquarters in Luanda, benefiting from the co-operation of delegates in the various zones of the country and of local radio stations which regularly broadcast the names of missing persons.

The Agency's greatest activity in the field was in exchanging family messages—about 3,600. A total of 725 searches for missing persons were undertaken, but fewer than 10% were successful. A total of 2,521 messages, mainly for retransmission to and from Portugal, went through the Geneva office during 1975.

The Portuguese were the principal users of Agency services. To help the Portuguese Red Cross set up its own tracing agency, a Geneva staff member was sent to Lisbon for two months.

This co-operation with the National Society, later extended to the conflict in Timor (see below), was extremely useful.

The Angola card index, by the end of 1975, contained the names of nearly 5,000 persons, including about 1,300 prisoners of war.

### **Timor**

The Portuguese colony on the island of Timor constituted a new arena for Agency activities. This action came to an end however on 6 December, for reasons dealt with elsewhere in this report (see page 18).

By that date the names of more than 1,500 prisoners of war had been recorded, including 23 Portuguese soldiers who were still being held at the end of the year. Agency headquarters in Geneva received 173 tracing requests, 85 of which were successful, and transmitted to various countries 253 Red Cross messages received from the ICRC delegation in East Timor. About 1,500 family messages were also transmitted direct by the delegation.

### **Lebanon**

Through radio links between Geneva and the ICRC delegation in Beirut, the Agency was able to render vital services, even during the height of the tragic and violent conflicts. Of a total of about 1,800 inquiries received in Geneva, coming mostly from Lebanese outside their country, the Agency was able to provide positive answers in 70% of all the cases. Very often, the queries were answered within 48 hours.

### **Other recent conflicts**

The consequences of the conflicts in the Middle East and Cyprus, and of the events in Chile, continued in 1975 to entail a substantial amount of work for the Agency.

In the Middle East, where delegations continued their work in Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Gaza, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Cairo, the Agency handled about 27,000 family messages during the year and also transmitted a great number of such official documents as marriage and death certificates, school and university diplomas, etc.

About 750 investigations were undertaken concerning internees and other civilians in the occupied territories.

At the end of the year, the Agency had filed the names of all the internees reported by the Detaining Power and visited by ICRC delegates.

## Chile

The Central Tracing Agency bureau, whose work was started at the same time as the other ICRC activities in Chile, carried on its action in close co-operation with the delegates and received about 30 inquiries a day from people seeking news of their relatives. It also received many requests for information from different countries and from ICRC headquarters in Geneva. Most of these sought information about missing persons or asked for transmission of family messages.

The Agency bureau continued to list the names of the detainees visited and kept up to date a substantial card index with all the relevant details obtainable. List of missing persons were submitted to the authorities and in about half of the cases positive replies could be given to the families within about one month. Renewed efforts were made to trace those still reported as missing.

The Agency also gave travel documents to 121 refugees who had been granted asylum in various embassies in Santiago.

## Cyprus

The local branch of the Agency which opened shortly after the outbreak of the conflict in 1974 was closed on 31 August 1975 but its work was carried on by the Cyprus Red Cross in co-operation with the Agency in Geneva.

The most tragic problem remaining at the end of 1975 was that many persons were still missing. All available information about them was turned over by the Agency to the Cyprus Red Cross and the ad hoc inter-communal commission, pursuant to an agreement between the ICRC and the National Society and the decisions reached by the parties to the inter-communal talks in Vienna.

Since postal relations between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot zones had not been restored, exchanges of family messages continued to be a major activity, with an average of 40,000 messages each month. This work also was taken over by the Cyprus Red Cross and the authorities, but the ICRC delegates continued to provide for transmission of messages from one zone to the other.

By the end of 1975, more than 1,100,000 family messages had been handled since the beginning of the conflict.

## Asian sub-continent

While the conflict in Bangladesh may now seem remote and although the repatriation operations were finished in 1974, Agency work resulting from the conflict continued both in Geneva and in the field.

The volume of correspondence passing through Geneva was considerable, consisting of nearly 5,000 items; the index-card system for *INPAK* contained more than 800,000 cards at the end of the year.

In the field, Agency activity was mainly carried out through the regional delegation in Delhi and the delegation in Dacca, dealing with a continued flow of inquiries about missing Pakistani soldiers.

In Dacca, the Agency received and transmitted 41,200 family messages, an 84% reduction as compared to the previous year.

Major Agency activity continued in 1975 on behalf of non-local minorities in Bangladesh seeking to emigrate to Pakistan. Appeals by these persons against initial refusals continued to be accepted by the Dacca delegation until the end of March and were sent to the Islamabad delegation for submission to the Pakistani authorities. By the end of the year, favourable action had been taken on more than 5,000 of these appeals (see also page 18).

The Agency-connected activities of the Dacca delegation were taken over by the Bangladesh Red Cross on 15 December 1975.

## Earlier conflicts

Activities relating to earlier conflicts, especially World War II, continued to be carried out by the Agency, with requests coming from many places, but mainly from persons in the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Benelux countries, Spain, Italy and Poland.

Requests from Poland—amounting to 7,765 during the year—were mainly for certificates of captivity and tended to increase in frequency toward the end of the year. This was due to a new law taking effect on January 6, providing for increased pensions and other benefits for former war prisoners.

It should also be mentioned that the Agency was still drawing up certificates of captivity during 1975 in connection with World War I.

Finally, it must be noted that the 49 million cards in the files at the end of 1975 exhausted the space available in the existing quarters of the Agency.

# INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

The International Tracing Service (ITS) at Arolsen (Federal Republic of Germany), administered by the ICRC since 1955, celebrated a double anniversary in 1975. This unique international organisation had been in existence for 30 years, and the ICRC had been at Arolsen for 20 years.