

Central Tracing Agency

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Iraq and Iran

In September 1969, the ICRC installed a delegation in Baghdad, to work for the reunion of Iranian families who were dispersed between Iran and Iraq owing to the tension between the two countries over the Shatt-al-Arab and the forced repatriation of a large number of Iranians living in Iraq. In October and December, two preliminary operations were held under the auspices of the ICRC and more than a hundred Iranian nationals were allowed to return to their homes in Iraq.

On 16 January 1970, a third operation, involving forty-six persons, was carried out between the two countries. As the situation returned to normal, the ICRC recalled its delegation from Baghdad in March 1970

Central Tracing Agency

During 1970, the Central Tracing Agency received 45,316 requests and communications and sent out 43,510 letters. It opened 10,091 enquiries with National Red Cross Societies, ICRC delegations, the International Tracing Service at Arolsen and various other relevant bodies, and it was able to close 10,661 files, 4,936 of which had given positive results.

The Central Tracing Agency is constantly coping with a double task. It has to fulfil its very urgent and frequently arduous duties dictated by current events without, however, neglecting the many activities resulting from past conflicts. Whenever a new conflict flares up, the Central Tracing Agency immediately sets everything in motion in order to trace soldiers and civilians reported missing, to record information on captives as supplied by the Detaining Powers, to inform the Powers of Origin and families, and to transmit correspondence sent by prisoners of war and civilian internees to their families and vice versa. It must handle also the transmission of messages between civilians who have not been interned and those members of their families who are unable, owing to events, to correspond through normal channels.

Once hostilities end, the Central Tracing Agency continues to hold valuable information regarding the captivity and state of health of

prisoners and internees, the decease of soldiers who fell on the front and whose names were communicated to the Agency by the enemy, etc.

In 1970, the Central Tracing Agency was particularly involved in the hostilities in the Middle East. It continued to make enquiries into the fate of Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian, Saudi Arabian and Yemeni soldiers who had been reported missing during military operations over the previous three years, civilians who were presumed to have been arrested and Palestinians and Jordanians who had given no sign of life since the recent events in Jordan. It also made every possible effort to reunite families and transmitted thousands of family messages.

In this connection, we would mention that, as there have been no postal ties between Israel and the Arab countries since 1948, more than 4 million family messages have been transmitted by the ICRC (including its delegations and the Central Tracing Agency).

The sky-jacking of the three aircraft which fell into the hands of the Palestinian movements provided the Central Tracing Agency with some rather urgent and delicate enquiries. Anxious families everywhere called on the Agency for news and, through its radio link-up with the ICRC delegation in Amman, it was able to enquire into the fate of the passengers and crews and eventually to pass on the news it received on the liberation and evacuation of hostages. Also, in October, just after the end of the civil war, it sent a staff member to Amman to set up an office to enquire into the fate of those reported missing and to transmit family messages.

In so far as South-East Asia is concerned, the Central Tracing Agency is still receiving information from the Republic of Vietnam on the prisoners that it has taken. It has also taken steps to try to discover the fate of persons of various nationalities (journalists, teachers, missionaries, etc.) who have been reported missing over the past year in Khmer territory.

Apart from its current duties, the Central Tracing Agency is presented also with many requests relating to World War II and the conflicts that have taken place since 1945.

Lastly, it has prepared a handbook for National Red Cross Societies which covers various problems relating to the creation and organization of a national tracing office.