Origin of the International Tracing Service

During the Second World War, major population shifts took place in Europe, and the Jews and political opponents of the National-Socialist Regime were ruthlessly persecuted. As a result, countless families were torn apart.

In 1943 it became clear that there was an urgent need for an organization to trace missing persons and reunite families. Members of families often knew nothing of each other's whereabouts, nor whether their loved ones were well or even whether they were still alive. Parents and children were forcibly separated, fathers and mothers were taken away from their families for forced labour, and many people were murdered.

Individual answers were needed to the question of what had happened to millions of men, women and children of all ages, different races and nationalities.

The vast and complex task of registering data on those searching and those being sought, was made all the more difficult by the turmoil of the war. An attempt to help all these people was undertaken by the British Red Cross Society with the agreement of the Allied military authorities as early as 1943. It converted its Foreign Relations Department into a tracing bureau modelled on the Tracing Service of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, which already maintained an index of names. The programme was run by Major Eyre Carter of the Foreign Office Relief Department.

In early 1944, Sir Herbert Emmerson of the International Committee for Refugees called a meeting in London which was attended by representatives of the International Committee of the Red

Cross, the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). It was decided to assign UNRRA the task of setting up a very specific programme to deal with the problem. The programme was primarily concerned with citizens of Allied countries and involved:

- registering and tracing displaced persons, and
- reuniting families.

Following the transfer of the tracing bureau operated by the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) to the Combined Displaced Persons Executive (CDPX) in July 1945, the Allied Control Council on 17 September 1945 instructed UNRRA to establish a Central Tracing Bureau.

The Central Tracing Bureau was administered by UNRRA until 30 June 1947 when it was taken over by the International Refugee Organization (IRO). It was at this time that it received its present title:

International Tracing Service (ITS)

Direction of the International Tracing Service was assumed by the Allied High Commission for Germany (HICOG) on 1 April 1951.

When the abrogation of the Occupation Statute for the Federal Republic of Germany was being prepared in 1954, steps had to be taken to ensure that the International Tracing Service would continue to exist. In the same year, the so-called Paris Agreements were signed. These laid the groundwork for the Bonn Agreements between the Allied Western Powers and the Federal Republic of Germany which followed in 1955.

The International Committee of the Red Cross agreed in 1955 to accept charge of the administration and direction of the International Tracing Service. The director of the ITS is therefore delegated by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At the same time, both the ruling and supervision of the ITS' work and responsibility for ensuring coordination between governments passed to an international commission composed of representatives from ten states. (see p. 11)

In addition the Federal Republic of Germany undertook to provide the ITS' annual budget from the budget of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

This formula for running the ITS has stood the test of time:

Direction and Administration:	Ruling Body/ Supervision:	Budget:
International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva	International Commission for the International Tracing Service	Federal Republic of Germany

Although the tasks of the International Tracing Service have often been called into question, the continuing high number of incoming inquiries leave no doubt that the Service must carry on its work.