

THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

BRIEF REVIEW OF ITS HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Before the Seventh Session of the General Council convenes, the International Tracing Service, which came into existence as the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau, will have been transferred from the control of the International Refugee Organization to that of the Allied High Commission. The latter authority, fully appreciating the importance of ensuring the security and preservation of the ITS records and the need to continue to make these available in the future as heretofore, has announced its willingness to accept full operational responsibility as from 1 April 1951.

2. It is with great satisfaction that the Director-General is able to report to the General Council this decision, and he has accordingly thought it appropriate to present to Member Governments a brief review of the history of the ITS and its activities during the period it has been the responsibility of the Organization.

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3. The need to set up machinery for tracing missing persons was first considered in 1943 by the Committee on Displaced Populations of the Allied Post-war Requirements Bureau in London, especially in view of the vast displacements of

446

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID



G
P
P
N
o
b
s
P
4
a
S
D
t
U
u
o
D
U
w
E
c
R
A
c
L
w
c
f

population caused by various circumstances of World War II; in particular, by Nazi persecution of Jews and political opponents, together with the Nazi programme of slave labour. Tentative plans took shape to establish national tracing bureaux (NTB) in various European countries and to develop a central tracing service along the lines of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Prisoner-of-War Card Index.

4. During 1944 the military authorities in Europe became increasingly concerned about "communications to, from and about civilians in liberated areas". The Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) had directed that Displaced Persons be registered on DP.2 cards, and at that time the concept of tracing was to "marry" incoming enquiries against these registration cards. UNRRA was also concerned about this question and, when a tracing and locating unit was set up in May 1945 by SHAEF to collect nominal rolls of concentration camp inmates for onforwarding to the NTB, and also to maintain, by means of the DP.2 cards, a central register of non-repatriable refugees and displaced persons, UNRRA was asked to provide personnel to staff this unit. In June 1945 this unit moved with SHAEF Headquarters from Versailles to Frankfurt.

5. In July 1945, after the dissolution of SHAEF, the Combined Displaced Persons Executive (CDPX) announced the establishment of a central records office and a central tracing bureau, indicating that it would "in due course hand over this responsibility to UNRRA by agreement with all interested organizations".

A quadripartite working group was then set up by CDPX to consider the whole question of tracing. Their report was presented to the Prisoners-of-War, and Displaced Persons (PW and DP) Directorate on 13 September and finally accepted, with minor amendments, by the Coordinating Committee of the Control Commission of Germany on 17 September 1945. This document (CORC/P(45)54) represented the first official policy formulated for the tracing of missing persons and may be

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

COPYRAPHID

regarded as the charter of the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau (CTB). The objectives, as laid down in this document, were to search for missing military and civilian persons of United Nations nationalities and establish the fate of those who would not be found; to locate; collect and preserve all available records regarding refugees and displaced persons in Germany; and to serve as a link to bring interested persons into communication with each other.

6. It was also recommended that each member of the United Nations that had not already established a tracing bureau be invited to do so and that each such bureau should receive all initial enquiries concerning its own nationals. Furthermore, the zonal search bureaux, which had already been established in each zone, should assume responsibility for the initiation of tracing and search in their respective zones, including the handling of all enquiries passed to them by the CTB. The zonal bureaux should operate under the complete jurisdiction of the respective zonal military commanders, subject only to the general policies of the Allied control council and the Central Tracing Policy Board. The CTB and associated Central Records Office, which was already in operation, should be placed at the disposal of the Allied Control Council to be operated by UNRRA under policies and directives issued by the Central Tracing Policy Board. The CTB should function as a central clearing house between the zonal and national bureaux.

7. On 18 October 1945 this approved policy was submitted to UNRRA, which then gave "authority to proceed and carry out the task". In February 1946 UNRRA formulated its tracing policy "to accept responsibility for tracing persons falling under the definition of the Council Resolutions as eligible for UNRRA care. This included persons receiving care from UNRRA in Germany, persons eligible for but not in receipt of such care, and persons technically eligible for such care but now dead". UNRRA could not accept responsibility for tracing

446

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT

COPYRIGHT



P
u
H
3.
co
th
to
tr
in
ad
tr
spl
n
9.
the
was
tin
nec
IRO
o.
ue
esc
ati
los
eld

any Germans, except victims of Nazi persecution. Accordingly, the central headquarters of the CTB was established at Arolsen, Germany, together with the UNRRA Headquarters.

8. In January 1947, with the end of UNRRA in sight, retrenchment in activities consequently necessary, and the transfer of UNRRA Headquarters to Paris imminent, the future of the CTB was reviewed. The PW & DP Directorate stated its requirements to be first of all the completion of the work of the records branch, including child tracing; and, secondly, mass tracing through newspapers and radio in order that information so obtained could be passed to the NTB. The arrangement finally adopted was that of decentralising to the zonal tracing bureaux individual and child tracing, while retaining in Arolsen a central records office and mass tracing. This plan went into effect in February 1947, and UNRRA undertook to continue the operation until the cessation of UNRRA operations on 30 June of that year.

C. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

9. During the First Part of the First Session of the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization in February 1947, the Executive Secretary was instructed "to proceed to the study of the special problem raised by the continuation of the activities of the CTB after 30 June 1947 and to put forward all necessary plans on this subject in connection with the entry into operation of the IRO".

c. In May of the same year the Preparatory Commission further examined the question and, "convinced of the supreme importance of the tracing of missing persons" resolved "to ensure the continuation of tracing activities by means of an International Tracing Bureau, taking into consideration..." that its "scheme would be closely modelled on the proposals of the Conference of National Tracing Bureaux held in Brussels on 15 September 1946". These proposals for the continuation on