

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## **Archives of the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany**

(International Commission for the International Tracing Service)

2012-20

### **1 SUMMARY**

Between 1933 and 1945 the world went through an unprecedented period of destruction and persecution caused by the National Socialist regime in Germany. The Second World War represents the widest conflict humanity ever experienced. At the same time the Holocaust took place.

The International Tracing Service was established for the purpose of tracing missing persons and collecting, classifying, preserving and rendering accessible to governments and interested individuals the documents relating to Germans and non-Germans who were interned in National Socialist concentration or labour camps or to non-Germans who were displaced as a result of the Second World War. The ITS archives, undoubtedly the largest depository of original papers that tell the fates of those who were persecuted and murdered, comprise about 30 million documents issued during the National Socialist period or immediately after the war. The collection contains material from concentration and extermination camps, ghettos and Gestapo prisons, as well as documentation on the displacement and exploitation of forced labour and the fates of displaced people including survivors searching to emigrate out of a destroyed Europe.

Since 1946, the archives of the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen (Germany) have been testimony to the persecution of minorities and political opponents of all kinds, the extreme exploitation of forced labour and a vast uprooting of people from their homes. As time passed, the ITS became tasked with further missions: the wider dissemination of information on the persecution, the opening and description of the archives, education and research. Many scholars from universities, memorial sites and educational and research institutes in various countries are currently using ITS archives for their research programmes. The sheer volume of the ITS archives illustrates the extent of Nazi crimes. As witnesses will soon no longer be among us to tell their stories, the documents become of even greater relevance. They will bear witness of what happened for generations to come and emphasize the essential values of democracy and freedom, protection of the rights of minorities and respect for human rights.

"To remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all", said Nobel Prize laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, warning the world that the atrocities must never be forgotten in order to make sure that they will not happen again.

### **2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR**

#### **2.1 Name (person or organization)**

International Commission (IC) for the International Tracing Service (ITS)

#### **2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

Under the control of the International Commission for the International Tracing Service, the International Tracing Service is the custodian of the collection (The International Agreement signed in Berlin 9 December 2011 does not touch property-rights of those who entrusted the ITS with the archives and documents). (See below par. 4.1 Legal Information)

#### **2.3 Contact persons**

- The Chair person of the International Commission for the International Tracing Service
- The Director of the International Tracing Service

## 2.4 Contact details

- Monsieur Frederic Baleine du Laurens (current Chair of IC/ITS, at the time of the nomination)  
Ministere des affaires etrangeres et europeennes  
Directeur des archives  
President of the International Commission for the ITS (2011-2012)  
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- Herr Harald Gehrig (next Chair of the IC/ITS, from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012)  
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## 3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

Exact title to appear on the certificate :

ARCHIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE  
ARCHIVES DU SERVICE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES  
ARCHIVE DES INTERNATIONALEN SUCHDIENSTES

The International Commission for the ITS proposes to register to the "Memory of the World" two main groups of documents :

- (A) the collection of original documents
- (B) the Central Name Index

### 3.2 Registration details

A) The collection of original documents total of 5.083 linear meters (1m)

Stock of Documents of the International Tracing Service

The collections of the ITS represent the full range of Nazi administration during the time of persecution. The documents may help to deepen existing knowledge and show new aspects which will render even more profound insights into the incredible bureaucratic machinery of the time. The records can be subdivided into

the following main groups:

Incarceration Documents  
Forced Labour Documents  
Documents on Displaced Persons (DPs) and Emigration  
Child Tracing Branch

1.678lm

1.260 lm

1.745 lm

400 lm

*Incarceration* - This archival unit comprises documents from concentration and extermination camps, prisons and ghettos, as well as Gestapo files. The documents consist of list material, such as transport lists, death books, reports on changes in the number of inmates or lists from the camps infirmary, and of individual documents, such as registration cards, cards on personal belongings or work cards. Military Government Questionnaires from the allied forces document the liberation of the camps. This collection also contains registration papers preserved from the ghettos and prisons. The Gestapo files show the omnipresent surveillance of political opponents.

Furthermore, the ITS is in possession of roughly 2,900 personal effects, of which the former owners are known. The personal effects are mainly from the concentration camps of Neuengamme (2,400) and Dachau (330). In addition there are some personal belongings from prisoners of the Hamburg Gestapo (50), the concentration camps of Natzweiler and Bergen-Belsen, as well as the transit camps at Amersfoort and Compiègne.

*Forced Labour* - This archival unit consists of wartime and post-war documents. The individual documents from the wartime consist of employment records, labour books, insurance documents and registration cards issued by the German authorities, health insurance companies and employers. The post-war documents were created in accordance with order No.163 of the allied forces. All German offices and communities had to report the foreigners who had resided on the territory of the four occupied zones from 1939 to 1945.

*Displaced Persons* - This collection holds records relating to displaced persons who were attended to by international refugee organizations in the territory of the three western occupational zones, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and the United Kingdom after the war. The records from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and from the International Refugee Organization (IRO) and various other aid agencies, dating from the end of the Second World War and thereafter, document the repatriation of displaced persons and include records related to the emigration which resulted from the Second World War. UNRRA and IRO registrations are made up of registration cards, lists, medical records and questionnaires.

*Child Tracing Branch* - This section of the archives keeps records of unaccompanied children who survived concentration camps or forced labour and were under the age of 18 in 1945. It includes documents relating to children born between 1928 and 1945 whose parents are unknown. The documents include birth certificates, tracing files from the international aid organizations and various lists. The records originate from German offices as well as from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and from the International Refugee Organization (IRO).

## B) The Central Name Index

(50 million reference cards of paper) 9.610 lm

The Central Name Index (CNI) contains 50 million reference cards on the fate of 17.5 million people and is an indispensable key to the documents.

The origin of this Index is the registration of displaced persons, after their liberation from the DP camps, on so-called DP-3-cards. All subsequent registrations of the names in the actual documents or from the correspondence (card-indexing of inquiries) over more than half a century are united here. Names were not only registered from the documents kept in the incarceration, forced labour, displaced persons/emigration and child tracing service fields, but also from the inquiries the ITS received, namely on so-called inquirer cards. The CNI thus consists both of original registration records as well as of reference cards written by the ITS itself, which have the same paper format. To be able to reunite families after the end of war, the International Tracing Service registered all personal information from the documents and joined the data together in the Central Name Index.

The Index is organised by a unique alphabetic-phonetic system. Contriving such a system for both the documents in all the documentary fields and the ITS correspondence files turned out to be necessary because the spellings were so diverse. On the one hand, the victims came from many different countries and, on the other hand, their personal data were frequently noted down by fellow inmates speaking other languages. Thus the names of individual victims were largely recorded phonetically and very often misspelled. Thanks to the originally designed alphabetical-phonetic system which was increasingly refined over the years, it is possible to trace all the available references to registrations in the records which relate to the same person.

### 3.4 History of the ITS / provenance of the archives of the ITS

The ITS was established at Bad Arolsen in order to help those who had been persecuted during the Second World War to assert their rights. From the very beginning this humanitarian mandate has been at the forefront of the work of the ITS and this is still true today. Even though the name "Tracing Service" is becoming outdated - currently tracing amounts to only about one per cent of the processed cases -, the institution at Bad Arolsen remains predominantly a service provider in the interest of those who suffered.

A large part of the population of Europe was scattered to many other parts of the world as a result of the turmoil of war, and the chaos which took over towards the end of the War. In 1943, the Foreign Relations Department at the British Red Cross in London was changed into a tracing bureau. The Agence Centrale de Recherches/Central Tracing Agency (ACR or CTA) of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, which already had an index of names at its disposal from previous very different conflicts and could contribute a great deal of experience, played a decisive part in the foundation of the ITS.

The Allied Military Authorities had to register thousands upon thousands of displaced civilians in the liberated territories, in France for example as early as in 1944. The Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) in Versailles gave orders that all displaced persons should be registered on so-called "DP-cards".

In addition to the registrations carried out after the war, efforts were made to obtain the names of people imprisoned in the concentration camps. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which had been established by President Roosevelt in Washington in 1943 played a considerable part in this. It also provided the necessary personnel.

On 28 June 1945, UNRRA and SHAEF were moved from Versailles to Frankfurt am Main, where SHAEF was dissolved in July 1945. The successor of the tracing bureau became the "Combined Displaced Persons Executive". In September 1945, the Allied Control Council charged UNRRA with the task of establishing a Central Tracing Bureau (CTB) with the task of taking up the search for missing military and civilian personnel from those countries which belonged to the United Nations, starting the collection and preservation of all documents referring to this group of people and reuniting families which had been torn apart.

On 16 November 1945, a transfer of the Central Tracing Bureau from Frankfurt to Arolsen was proposed to UNRRA. Arolsen had not been destroyed, was situated in the middle of the four occupation zones and larger buildings as well as intact telegraph and telephone facilities were available. The transfer itself took place in January 1946. From then on, the name of the tracing bureau was: UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau, Arolsen.

On the basis of an order to all German offices issued by the Allies on 6 December 1945, this Central Tracing Bureau had to compile, with several copies, lists of names of nationals of the countries represented in the United Nations who had their residence in Germany during World War II or at the time of the registration. These registration records were to be handed over to regional collecting points and the Central Tracing Bureau in Arolsen was supposed to receive a copy.

UNRRA, which had been chiefly entrusted with the repatriation of people displaced during the war stopped its work in 1947 and the institution in Arolsen was taken over by the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization (PICRO) in July 1947. Briefly afterwards, the PICRO Headquarters in Geneva decided on the official name "International Tracing Service" that is still used today. Until March 1951, the ITS was subordinate to the IRO (International Refugee Organization) which discontinued its work at that time, because it was predominantly responsible for the emigration of displaced persons who had not returned to their home countries.

While it was directed by the IRO, well over 1,000 employees worked for the ITS in addition to personnel of the Allied Forces, as well as former victims themselves and German citizens. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1951, the Allied High Commission for Germany (IDCOG) took charge of the ITS and directed it until the Occupation Statute ended in May 1955 and IDCOG was dissolved.

From then on the "Deutschlandvertrag", which regulated relations between the Federal Republic of Germany

and the three Western Occupying Powers, was in force. With the end of Occupation an Agreement was reached on the establishment of an International Commission for the International Tracing Service (IC-ITS). In addition it was announced that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would be responsible for the administration of the ITS.

On 12 September 1990, the "Two+Four Agreement" on the final regulation of Germany was signed in Moscow. This invalidated the earlier agreement on relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the three Western Powers. In an exchange of Notes on 27 September 1990 between the Foreign Office and the Ambassadors of the French Republic, the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland it was determined that, among other things, the provision of the Seventh Part Article 1 in the Transition Agreement continued to be effective : "The Federal Republic of Germany assumes the obligation to guarantee the continuation of the work that is presently being carried out by the International Tracing Service".

At only a very late stage was the ITS assigned a legal status : Today, the ITS is an institution with international character that has received its legal capacity by means of an act under international law of the signatory states (*sui generis*). The latter was transferred into German Law by the German Legislator in 1993 (Law about the Agreement of 15 July 1993 concerning the Legal Status of the International Tracing Service in Arolsen). A legal capacity is thus valid in civil law at least.

The IC/ITS consists of 11 member states: the Kingdom of Belgium, the French Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Hellenic Republic, the State of Israel, the Italian Republic, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of Poland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

On 9 December 2011, the eleven-member International Commission signed two agreements on the future tasks and administration of the ITS. These new agreements allow to continue the tasks of the ITS into such areas as historical research, education, commemoration and cataloguing, while at the same time allowing for expansion of its activities to include the gradual development of the International Tracing Service into a center for documentation, information and research. The German Federal Archives will become the new institutional partner as of 1st January 2013. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that it would withdraw from the management of the institution at the end of 2012.

## 4 LEGAL INFORMATION

### 4.1. Ownership of the archives held at the International Tracing Service

At the end of Second World War the International Tracing Service was established for the purpose of tracing missing persons and collecting, classifying, preserving and rendering accessible to governments and interested individuals the documents relating to Germans and non-Germans who were interned in National Socialist concentration or labor camps or to non-Germans who were displaced as a result of the War. The International Commission for the ITS regularly confirmed these missions, assuming that the relevant archives deposited at the ITS were to be preserved and duly protected. Over the years the ITS (like its predecessors organizations) collected and centralized a vast documentation to fulfilling its missions. With such a clear mandate, the International Commission never deemed necessary to further debate on the ownership of the archives deposited in Bad Arolsen under its permanent supervision.

In the *Agreement on the ITS* signed in Berlin on 9 December 2011, the signatory Parties (the eleven Member States of the International Commission) have stated the following:

- "(...) the present Agreement does not prejudice the ownership of the archives and documents reposing with the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen" (Preamble);
- "Without prejudice to ownership, the archives and documents held at the International Tracing Service shall be inviolable." (Article 12)

(see Annex 8 – The Agreements signed in Berlin 9 December 2011)

The International Commission for the ITS, that is all the eleven Member States, confirmed hereby its sole responsibility for the conservation and the preservation of the ITS archives in Bad Arolsen.

### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

The International Tracing Service  
Represented by the Director of the ITS  
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34454 Bad Arolsen

## GERMANY

Telephone: 00 49 (0)5691 629-0

Email: email@its-arolsen.org

### 4.3 Legal status

There is a clearly defined legal status.

The International Tracing Service is based on the Bonn Agreements of 6 June 1955, when the governments of Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America signed an agreement to set up an International Commission to supervise the ITS. The Federal Republic of Germany undertook financial responsibility for the ITS. Poland and Greece joined the ITS at a later stage.

The International Commission, consisting of eleven member states, monitors the activities of the ITS. On its foundation the ITS was given the humanitarian tasks of providing information about the fate of those persecuted by the Nazi regime and reuniting families torn apart by the war. The ITS is under the direction and management of the International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva.

On 16 May 2006, the Commission decided to amend the Bonn Agreements to grant access to the documents to researchers. The ratification process was completed on 28 November 2007. Digital copies of the database are accessible in those individual member states who have requested a copy.

On 9 December 2011 the 11 member states represented on the International Commission signed two new agreements on the ITS mandate and management. The new agreements are supposed to enter into force on 1st January 2013 and will supersede all former agreements.

The ICRC will withdraw from the direction of the institution on 31 December 2012. The Director of the ITS will be appointed by the International Commission by unanimous decision. The German Federal Archives will become the new institutional partner. The role of the institutional partner is to advise and work together with the International Commission and the director of the ITS in fields such as conservation and preservation, cataloguing and indexing; budgeting and auditing and human resource management. The new agreements formally extend the tasks of the ITS into such areas as historical research, education, commemoration and cataloguing, thereby enlarging the already existing main mandate of tracing.

### 4.4 Accessibility

In accordance with the Regulations for Access adopted by the International Commission in November 2007, the ITS collections are accessible to the public for research purposes. The documents are made available in digital form to prevent possible damage to the originals. Correspondence between private or official inquirers and the ITS is accessible 25 years after its creation. Researchers sign a user statement in which they take on individual responsibility for respecting the privacy and other laws and regulations, as well as other generally accepted practices regarding personal data. Survivors and the relatives of victims have free access to the collections regarding their families.

The ITS receives about 13.000 inquiries from up to 70 countries every year. About 80 per cent of these are humanitarian requests, primarily sent by survivors or the relatives of victims. Since the opening of the archives in late 2007, the ITS has received altogether 5,800 inquiries from researchers.

Since the start of the digitization process until the present day, the ITS has almost fully digitized the entire collection of original documents and the Central Name Index. The estimated percentage is 95%. The digitization of the remaining 5% of original documents is ongoing as these documents come from the correspondence files. The entire digitization work is carried out at the ITS by ITS employees. No original documents are leaving the institution for this purpose. In total, 84,600.000 images of documents in the ITS archives were created and the digital copies have been sent to the recipients - members of the International Commission.

The following member states and institutions received a digital copy of the database:

USA

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHIM)

Israel

Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority

Poland	Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) / Institute of National Remembrance
Belgium	Archives generales de Royaume Section 5: Archives contemporaines
France	Archives nationales
Luxembourg	Centre de documentation et de Recherche (CDDR)
United Kingdom	The Wiener Library

In accordance with one of the provisions of the Intergovernmental Agreement of 9 December 2011, arrangements for distance access are planned in the years to come..

#### 4.5 Copyright status

(A) (collection of original documents) Not relevant (B) Considering that the Central Name Index was produced by the ITS itself, the proprietary right rests with the ITS.

## 5 ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE SELECTION CRITERIA

### 5.1 Authenticity

There is no doubt that these archives are authentic and have reliable identity and provenance.

*Incarceration Documents:* These records are original documents from the concentration and death camps of the "Third Reich", ghettos and Gestapo prisons.

*Forced Labour Documents:* The records are original documents from the wartime, produced for instance by employers, local administrations and community councils, labour offices, hospitals and social insurance companies.

*Documents on Displaced Persons:* These documents are originals providing information on the registration procedures in the DP Camps.

*Central Name Index :* The CNI, created by the ITS, is a totally original and authentic document.

### 5.2 World significance

*World significance:* The archives of the ITS are an irreplaceable heritage testifying to the Holocaust. The archives of the ITS are also a unique collection of documents relating to Germans and non-Germans who were interned in National Socialist concentration or labour camps and to non-Germans who were displaced as a result of the Second World War, including the Holocaust and other mass murders committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. The collections held at ITS contain encompassing information on the DPs and their fate after 1945. Owing to the alphabetic-phonetic Central Name Index, with its 50 million references to 17.5 million civilian victims of the Second World War, the International Tracing Service is the only institution which has been able to trace persons from all victims' groups and ex-inmates of all camps.

The documentation on the concentration camps and the Central Name Index include the names of civilian victims of the Second World War from all over the world. They testify to the immense suffering of millions of human beings. Following a guided tour of the archives, every visitor to the ITS is both horrified and impressed by the amount of documentation bearing witness to atrocities of unimaginable consequence.

### 5.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style

**Time:** Between 1933 and 1945, the world witnessed a brutal dictatorship - the Nazi regime -, the deadliest conflict in human history - the Second World War - and the most serious crime against humanity - the Holocaust. The "total war" that was declared by Germany erased the distinction between civilian and military resources and led to the exploitation of millions of forced labourers.

The effects of war, persecution, exploitation and displacement left their marks until today. The original documents in the ITS archives reflect these unprecedented tragedies of human history and reveal the individual experiences and sufferings of millions of victims.

**Place:** The importance of the ITS collection is universal on account of the number of countries concerned. The National Socialists occupied Europe, parts of Africa and Asia and imposed their deadly regime in these

areas. They also forced their allies to oppress minorities in their countries. The Nazi regime always considered its racial and political ideas and his fascist ideology on a global scale and acted accordingly. It almost led to the complete extinction of the Jewish population in Germany and Eastern European countries. The Second World War was followed by a wave of emigration from survivors of the Holocaust and forced labour to countries all over the world. People from about 70 different countries today turn to the ITS for information. The German town Bad Arolsen was chosen by the Allied forces after the end of the Second World War to collect and safeguard the documents on Nazi persecution, forced labour and displacement.

People: Millions of people from many different countries were persecuted by the Nazi regime because of their political opinion, their religion, their origin, their disabilities or their sexual orientation. Any minority in Germany and the occupied countries was jeopardized. The documents in the ITS archives give evidence of all groups of civilians persecuted during the National Socialist period and the Second World War, among them Jews, Sinti and Roma, political opponents, homosexuals, Jehova's Witnesses, Freemasons, people with disabilities, Resistance fighters, and other citizens of countries occupied or ruled by the 'Third Reich'.

The Holocaust reflects one of the darkest chapter in the history of mankind. Survivors, such as Elie Wiesel, Saul Friedlander, Imre Kertesz, Ralph Giordano, Noach Flug, Arno Lustiger whose persecution is documented in the ITS archives are today the strongest supporters of human rights, freedom and democracy. They are engaged in the fight against any forms of genocide and suppression of minorities.

Subject and theme: After the end of Nazi persecution and the Second World War the ITS discovered the fates of missing persons, reunited families and supported displaced persons in finding a new home. The unique service of the ITS could provide information, clarity and certainty thanks to its rich archival holdings and also offered the opportunity to claim and obtain moral or financial compensation. "This is a service dedicated to millions of innocent victims of war, dictatorship and intolerance and to their families. We serve the dead and the living, men and women, adults and children, Jews and gentiles, we serve all nationalities, the Germans, the Czechs, the Dutch, the Poles, we serve concentration camp victims regardless whether they were social democrats, liberals, communists or gypsies. We serve- period!", said Hugh Elbot, the American director of the International Tracing Service, in August 1952 (ITS Digital Archives Doe. 82507500).

The collection constitutes an extremely rich source of documents and sheds light on numerous questions. The systematic annihilation of people, the unprecedentedness of the Holocaust, its impacts today, the systems of concentration camps, individual fates, the oppression of minorities and the mass exploitation of forced labourers as well as many other phenomena of the time are subjects to research and discussions all over the world. The multitude of themes and personal stories documents history.

Form and style: The ITS collection is an outstanding example of how a dictatorship documented its crimes. In particular the incarceration documents cast light on the systematic procedures and techniques of persecution that the Nazis developed and refined. Frequently, the fate of someone can be reconstructed from the day of his arrest until his liberation, his whereabouts directly after the war or his death.

## 6 Contextual information

"People here commit themselves to preventing oblivion, to finding and preserving victims' names- in other words: they engage in maintaining the dignity of man", said Mr. Joachim Gauck on his visit to the ITS in May 2010. In a few years'time, contemporary witnesses of Nazi persecution and forced labour will no longer be among the living. Their children and grand-children as well as school children will no longer be able to ask the questions that trouble their mind. In this regard, the ITS collection offers enormous possibilities for keeping the memory alive, for providing valuable information, for pursuing historical research and for enlightening and teaching future generations. The use and preservation of the ITS documents lay the foundation that this important work can continue.

### 6.1 Rarity

All the documents listed for the current application are unique.

Considering that the ITS does not preserve documents on any one individual camp, location or employer alone, its original documents may give evidence of a person's persecution 'itinerary' in its entirety. That is to say that the three-part structure of the documents relating to the subjects: incarceration, forced labour and displaced persons may permit the institution to fully retrace a person's biography of the time. The Central Name Index with its specific alphabetic-phonetic system is the main tool to access the documents and a rarity itself while bearing witness to the rarity of the collection as a whole.