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**EMERGENCY PLAN FOR DEALING WITH ACCUMULATIONS  
OF RECORDS AND ARCHIVES IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES:  
A RAMP STUDY**

prepared by

Moncef Fakhfakh

General Information Programme and UNISIST

United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

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FAKHFAKH, Moncef

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## PREFACE

In a bid to respond effectively to the needs of Member States in general, and of developing countries in particular, in the specialized field of records management and archives administration, the Division of the General Information Programme of UNESCO has devised a long-term programme known as the Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP).

The major components of the RAMP programme coincide with the general themes of the General Information Programme. Accordingly, RAMP includes projects, studies and other activities designed to:

- put together standards, rules, methods and other standard-setting instruments for the processing and transfer of specialized information and the creation of compatible information systems;
- enable developing countries to set up their own data bases and access those already in existence throughout the world, so as to enhance the exchange and circulation of information by means of modern technology;
- promote the setting up of specialized regional information networks;
- contribute to the harmonious development of compatible international information services and systems;
- create national information systems and improve those systems' various components;
- formulate development policies and plans in this field;
- train information specialists and users and develop national and regional potential for training in information science, library science and archives administration.

The author of this study, carried out under contract with the International Council on Archives (ICA), studies the case of a country which has introduced an emergency plan for dealing with unprocessed and uncontrolled accumulations of records and archives.

The aim of this study is to devise a set of procedures and guidelines to be followed in similar situations and also to outline a process of establishing a national records and archives management system, in cases where an emergency plan is called for so as to eliminate backlog and encourage the setting up of a public records management system.

All comments and suggestions concerning this study are welcome and should be sent to the Division of the General Information Programme, UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP. Other studies carried out within the framework of RAMP are available from the same address.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PRESENTATION OF AN EMERGENCY PLAN FOR DEALING WITH ACCUMULATIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS AND ARCHIVES

As a rule, the situation of archives in every country is determined by a series of historical, political, economic and social factors - so much so that one might claim each situation to be a case in its own right. But because of the similarity of the overall historical circumstances affecting certain countries, somewhat similar situations are to be found in several countries, even in the field of archives.

Various studies and surveys, carried out in particular by the International Council on Archives,<sup>1</sup> have shown that the archives sector has not been sufficiently developed in many developing countries. It would be rewarding to study the causes and mechanisms that might be at the root of this situation, whether in political systems, methods of managing national affairs or cultural and linguistic traditions, etc. This is not our intention, however. The goal here is rather to put forward solutions for different types of breakdown which may affect the archives sector. The most serious dysfunction can result in the disappearance of archives management from government services and the anarchic accumulation of public records in unsuitable conditions for their conservation, without either appraisal or disposal.

If the blockage persists over a long period, the situation becomes a matter for concern, necessitating the adoption of a reorganization plan. Awareness of the seriousness of this state of affairs must become acute if such a plan is to take on an urgent character. An emergency plan for dealing with accumulations of records and archives in government services entails a series of measures designed to remove obstructions and remedy the malfunctioning of the archives system in a given country.

It is difficult to catalogue and inventory cases of breakdown, since a range of factors may be involved and create dissimilar situations. Some cases, like those where temporary difficulties arise without causing a real blockage, are not covered by this study. By way of illustration, a country whose archives building is full to capacity and where there is a waiting period of several years in order to obtain either an extension to the building or another building, certainly experiences difficulties both in preserving the documents treated and in collecting documents, but this does not, for all that, amount to a real dysfunction, particularly if the situation does not last long.

Incidentally, an emergency plan is essential whenever an archives system breaks down and when the situation persists long enough to render record-keeping almost non-existent. The most frequent obstructions are of two kinds, which concern:

- (a) Countries with some experience of archives management but where it has been suspended, often for political reasons (war, occupation or the establishment of authorities with an autocratic or personalized conception of power, etc.). This type of situation frequently leads to the neglect of archives and records of the past, and usually goes together with a restriction on the communication of archives, and a suspension of, or reduction in, the transfer of public records, which very often pile up in unsuitable storage conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> *These include primarily ad hoc studies or surveys, in most cases dealing with particular fields (such as preservation of documents, legislation or training) or the study of the situation of archives in a number of countries.*

The breakdown can also be caused by other factors, such as the constitution of young States in countries which have been colonized or where the new national administration has been unable, or has otherwise failed, to set up a system of archives.

- (b) Countries where oral traditions and practices often prevail over writing and documents, which have little or no archival experience, and where this sector has remained relatively undeveloped. We note that this type of situation is found above all in arid zones and pastoral civilizations or in regions whose economy was previously based on arboriculture or forest products. Many developing countries which are currently experiencing difficulties in setting up their archives system are in fact located in such zones. Repercussions from the colonial past, which most of the countries in question have experienced either directly or indirectly, often compound the difficulties of this geographical and historical context.

At all events, any policy to redress the archives situation in the two types of country mentioned above would benefit from the implementation of an emergency plan to put a stop to the process of deterioration.

## 1.2 GOALS OF THE PRESENT STUDY AND OF AN EMERGENCY PLAN

The work in hand entails studying the example of an emergency plan now being implemented in order to establish guidelines for the introduction of the operations necessary for dealing with accumulations of records and archives in government services. It has not been possible to conduct surveys in order to choose a country as a typical case. Several countries may be following or have followed such plans.<sup>1</sup> The author has chosen to take as an example the experiment carried out by his own country, Tunisia.

Such a plan makes it possible to relieve congestion in the premises where documents which have not been either appraised or classified have accumulated, thereby saving documents that may be very useful for scientific research and constitute a part of the national heritage.

What it also means is breaking out of the vicious circle of anarchic accumulations of documents, heightening the awareness of supervisors of government services of the importance of records management and highlighting the advantages of such a policy. Eliminating backlog provides an opportunity for government employees to become acquainted with the elementary tasks of records management.

The emergency plan must also afford an opportunity to lay the foundations of a national archives policy, which should be incorporated in a country's overall development framework as:

- part of the decision-making machinery;
- a tool for the smooth management of the country's affairs;
- a source of information;
- a means of justifying the rights of various interest groups;
- a component of national identity and sovereignty.

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<sup>1</sup> *In point of fact, at the time of writing this study, we learn that Algeria has just adopted an emergency plan similar to the one that is the subject of this study.*

Hence the adoption of an emergency plan leads to the formulation of a whole programme for setting up an archives system and creating the necessary conditions for its sustainability.

The advantage of introducing an emergency plan is that it mobilizes all government structures and enables the archives administration to achieve goals that it could probably not attain by merely using the means at its disposal, however substantial they may be. Such a plan is justified, in our opinion, by the sheer scale of the tasks to be accomplished in sorting out the archives situation and by the role that it can play as a first step towards the organization of a national archives system.

This is especially imperative in that the information age in which we are living is continually confronting us with problems posed by a swelling mass of documents, the many different ways of using them, the speed for their circulation, changing technologies and media, and the need to preserve these documents.

We must now, however, consider how the study of a particular example of an emergency plan can help us to lay down guidelines in this area.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Various questions may be asked about our study:

- Is it necessary to list all the forms of breakdown that occur in developing countries, or should we confine ourselves to the study of a single case?
- How far is the situation of the selected country representative of situations of breakdown to be observed in other countries?
- How can guidelines be drawn up on the basis of the study of a single experiment?
- How should these guidelines be presented: separately after the case-study, or by degrees as the experiment is analysed and the phases of its implementation are studied?

Admittedly, these queries are legitimate, but, as we see it, the need is to help archives to operate smoothly in the various countries and to gain, however slightly, from the experience of others. Given the geometric expansion of information and records and the challenge that the organization of those records' life cycle represents for the developing countries, the implementation of an emergency plan is altogether warranted and is clearly of great importance.

Without being certain of providing appropriate answers to these questions, we think it possible, on the strength of the case-study of a single country, to present guidelines for carrying out such plans in other countries. Types of breakdown should be considered in relation to the different aspects of the purpose of archives in general, and not the specific aspects of the situation of the case under review. In other words, levels and fields should be pinpointed where a blockage may occur. This may concern the management of current or non-current records, the collection of permanent archives, the archives building, conservation conditions, the calibre of the staff, the budget or financial resources. Similarly, decision-makers' awareness and the interest they take in the question can evidently be decisive in a number of cases.

We shall endeavour to describe the experiment carried out by Tunisia and the phases of its implementation while progressively formulating guidelines whose observance we recommend in similar circumstances. We rely on the judgement of colleagues who are in charge of similar



plans to adapt the measures taken or the solutions advocated to the contexts in which they are required to work.

## 2. EMERGENCY PLAN: PROGRAMME AND PREPARATORY MEASURES

### 2.1 FORMS OF BREAKDOWN OF AN ARCHIVES SYSTEM

It will be useful, before discussing decision-making with reference to the emergency plan, to paint a basic picture of the archives situation that previously prevailed in Tunisia.

The organization of archives in Tunisia dates back to the time of the sovereign Ahmed Bey (1837-1855). But the decisive phase was that of the reforms introduced by the Grand Minister Khéireddine. In 1874-1875, government records were inventoried, analysed and classified satisfactorily.<sup>1</sup> The communication of documents to the various government departments was also controlled. The documents collected date back to the seventeenth century. Before that date, only a few notarial deeds and manuscripts had been preserved.<sup>2</sup> The country was thus equipped with a fairly effective archives system. Tunisia was the first Arab country after Egypt to establish such a system.

During the colonial period (1881-1956) the administrative structure became complex. The Tunisian civil service, headed by the Grand Minister under the authority of the Bey (the country's sovereign), was controlled by a high-ranking French civil servant, the Secretary-General of the Government. It encompassed regional and local administration, justice, religion, habous<sup>3</sup> property and guides.

The holdings produced by the Tunisian Government have been well preserved, and now come under the authority of the National Archives. As regards other sectors (agriculture, industry, trade, public works, health, education and the dominion departments), these were directly controlled by France and the holdings produced in consequence were for the most part transferred to France.<sup>4</sup>

At the level of the civil service, a fairly profound rift occurred after the country's accession to independence in 1956. The new national civil service, fuelled by strong patriotic feelings, had not done its apprenticeship at the colonial school and had not been associated with the management of the country's affairs. Accordingly, such an important function as records and archives management did not find a place in administrative practice. Moreover, the ruling team had to face considerable difficulties in building a new State and in coping with the country's economic and social development.

Hence, from the end of the 1960s, the breakdown of the archives system became virtually general. The various factors in that breakdown were the following:

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<sup>1</sup> *Two large inventory registers are kept at the Tunisian National Archives. But the classification system of the documents in question has been changed.*

<sup>2</sup> *Manuscripts belonging to the public services were brought together at the Tunisian National Library. The collection contains more than 40,000 manuscripts.*

<sup>3</sup> *Property in mortmain.*

<sup>4</sup> *This includes in particular the collection from the 'Résidence générale' (which represented French authority in Tunisia). The collection, occupying some 750 metres of shelf space, is deposited in the city of Nantes and comes under the authority of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 1983, Tunisia has been microfilming this collection at its own expense.*

- lack of laws governing archives management, since only Decree No. 70-118 of 11 April 1970 relating to the organization of the Prime Minister's departments refers to the purpose of the Division of the 'General Archives of the Government';<sup>1</sup>
- absence of structures and services competent in the management of records and archives in the majority of government departments;
- non-existence of appraisal, filing and transfer of archives to the General Archives of the Government;
- lack of a corps of archivists and archive specialists;
- no more room in archives administration premises.

That breakdown, which lasted for quite a while, had the following consequences:

- a backlog of documents in the government services' premises which had not been either filed or appraised and which were often inappropriately stored;
- difficulty for these government services to find the required document when needed;
- recourse to arbitrary destruction of documents in order to liberate space;
- marginalization of the task of archives management and its professionals;
- impossibility of setting up archive collections for the current period (since no archive transfers were made after 1956) and, as a result, the country may lose an important part of its history.

So there is a contrast between this situation and the country's archives administration in the past, the wealth of its collections and its professional administrators' capabilities. A certain idea of authority has done nothing to help the development of the archives field, and, added to the above-mentioned factors, is one cause of this breakdown. The fact is that, often, the political authority has had no desire to make reference to the past and has preferred to focus attention solely on matters of immediate importance.

## 2.2 MEASURES PRECEDING THE EMERGENCY PLAN

The unblocking of the archives situation began in 1987, when a national commission was set up to study the matter and propose solutions. Results swiftly followed. A three-point plan to straighten out the archives situation was adopted:

- the enactment of a corpus of laws and regulations;<sup>2</sup>
- the administrative organization of archives;<sup>3</sup>
- the construction of a national building for archives.

Between 1989 and 1992, the new National Archives institution undertook a major awareness campaign on the establishment of a national archives system. But it had to advance on several fronts at once:

- to organize its own structures and recruit specialists;

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<sup>1</sup> *The archives service, which was set up in 1874, took the name General Archives of the Tunisian Government following the promulgation of the decree dated 4 February 1883 which instituted the post of Secretary-General of the Government, a high-ranking French civil servant who controlled the Tunisian administration.*

<sup>2</sup> *This includes Law No. 88-95 of 2 August 1988 on archives and three decrees promulgated in pursuance of that law.*

<sup>3</sup> *The setting up of the National Archives as a public establishment possessing legal personality and financial autonomy.*

- to help set up appropriate structures in this field in the ministries and government services;
- to supervise the studies for the construction of the building and to raise funds;
- to process the archival holdings using modern techniques;
- to participate in the training of archivists;
- to prepare to deal with the backlog, i.e. the unprocessed documents that had accumulated over several years.

The efforts made by the National Archives had begun to bear fruit, but the tasks to be accomplished far exceeded the capacities of this fledgling institution, confronted with a huge backlog. A brief assessment of the situation was carried out between the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992. A rough outline of the plan of action was drawn up.

In the meantime, however, the Tunisian State embarked at the beginning of 1992 on the implementation of a vast programme of administrative reform, in three areas:

- relations between the civil service and citizens;
- procedures, methods and working conditions;
- government employees.

The methods chosen for the implementation of this major programme were unusual, given the fact that previous attempts at administrative reform had failed. Some 30 topics relating to all aspects of administration were selected. Each topic was studied by a working group consisting of persons well acquainted with the issue (civil servants, retired employees and persons from the private sector). One of these groups dealt with the organization of government records.

This was a great archives opportunity. How did it come about? In fact, the awareness campaign waged by the National Archives prompted decision-makers to select the field of administrative records and archives as a field for administrative reform. The origin of this is also to be found in the archival legislation of the country, which has made records management obligatory for all government services. Another factor that likewise played a predominant role was the fact that the National Archives come under the authority of the Prime Minister, who is responsible for public administration and the supervision of this vast programme of administrative reform.

Accordingly, in April 1992 a working group<sup>1</sup> was formed to implement this project for the organization and management of the archiving of government records. Before going on to the presentation of the emergency plan, we should point out that it was the corollary of a preparatory process for a national policy on archives and awareness-raising among officials in charge of government services, and that it coincided fortunately with the administrative reform policy initiated by the country.

### 2.3 DRAWING UP THE EMERGENCY PLAN

The working group in charge of this project chose to carry out an assessment in order to highlight the general characteristics of the country's archives situation, even if a number of its members were quite familiar with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Each group signed with the Prime Minister a contract containing the terms of reference, and was remunerated for its work. The group in question comprised a university researcher, a 'general administrator' with both legal and documentary training, a teacher in archives administration and the Director of the National Archives.

### 2.3.1 Assessment of the situation

The study focused on fairly representative administrative samples, including ministries presenting certain differences in the organization of their documents, government establishments and the municipality of Tunis (the country's capital). The study focused on all matters relating to those institutions' documents, including premises, equipment, staff, processing of documents, etc.

The visits made to the archive repository concerned were preceded by interviews with high-ranking officials (Secretaries-General of ministries and of the Tunis city council) following official communications sent by the Prime Minister<sup>1</sup> to the bodies concerned. The visits paid to the different government services made it possible, by extrapolation, to assess the public archive situation.

Apart from the rare cases where government bodies' management of their records was fairly satisfactory, the typical situation of documents in government services was as follows:

(a) Management of current and semi-current (intermediate) records:

Very few government services had a classification system for their documents: hence, unsurprisingly, a waste of time occasioned by searches for the requisite documents when needed. In addition, by the time documents had ceased to be current records, they were no longer subjected to any proper archival handling (weeding of files, appraisal, transfer through the proper channels to an archive with identification of a document and its contents). Documents were thus piling up in or near work-places. It was generally when there was a change of supervisor or when the need arose to make room for new staff members that the administration effected the removal, often on a huge scale, of the accumulated documents to less sought-after places such as warehouses, cellars, store-rooms, lofts, etc. Such storage was sometimes anarchic: for instance, documents were kept alongside obsolete pieces of furniture or with other lumber.

(b) Premises and equipment:

Apart from a few cases where government services had properly equipped repositories reserved for archives, most government services did not have premises suitable for archives. Moreover, special buildings designed for this purpose are rare. As a rule, documents were stored in the kind of premises that could not house government services. These premises were often situated at a distance from the headquarters of government services, most frequently on industrial estates or in a warehouse zone near the port of Tunis.

Most of these premises did not comply with minimum safety standards, since there was a shortage or total lack of fire-detection or fire-fighting equipment, and the buildings suffered from water leaks or infiltration or long exposure to the sun (corrugated roofs). As regards shelving, it was in some cases makeshift, and frequently the documents were even left on the floor and therefore exposed to various causes of deterioration, especially if they were not protected by adequate storage units.

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<sup>1</sup> *The project comes under the authority of the Junior Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of administrative reform and the civil service.*

## (c) Staff:

Since archives management was non-existent in government services, the corps of archives specialists was reduced to a minimum. Apart from a few professionals, the staff assigned to archives were often unqualified or without previous experience elsewhere. Ministries and public bodies which had real archive services with functional posts were rare.

That situation was in fact due to several factors:

- a break between colonial era administrative practices and those at the time of independence;
- the length of the archiveless period, spanning more than a third of a century;
- inadequate resources at the disposal of the archive services, whether for recruiting professionals, fitting out repositories or purchasing equipment;
- lack of suitable specialist training;<sup>1</sup>
- lack of interest in archives, since those in charge of government services were more preoccupied with daily routine management than with the organization and archiving of administrative documents, which seldom appeared among their priorities. They seemed to prefer using the resources at their disposal for the specific tasks incumbent upon them rather than setting aside even a tiny proportion of those resources for the proper management of the records that their institutions generated.

### 2.3.2 Adoption of the emergency plan

After this assessment, the proposals for the sorting out of the archives situation were presented at the end of 1992. These included proposals to adopt an emergency plan to deal with the archives situation and eliminate backlog, and a medium-term plan aiming at the establishment of a records and archives management system in keeping with the options chosen by the country's archival legislation. On 26 February 1993, a select ministerial council, which was chaired by the Head of State, decided to adopt the project.

The aim of the emergency plan was to deal with untreated administrative documents that had accumulated in various government buildings so as to preserve documents that were of importance for scientific research, for the justification of the rights of all parties and for the country's historical records.

The aim was also to be able to dispose, at a later date, of other documents that were no longer of any use to the administration, to put an end to the anarchic accumulation of administrative documents and to meet the minimum conditions for setting up an effective archive system for public records. That was to be the subject of another plan, known as the 'medium-term plan'. The emergency plan was to be implemented in all State bodies, local government authorities and State-controlled establishments and enterprises.

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<sup>1</sup> *It was only in 1989 that a reform of the university teaching of library science set up a four-year training course in place of the previous two-year course. At the same time, the share of archives as a subject was increased and an archives administration option was introduced for the fourth year of study.*

## 2.4 SUBSTANCE OF THE PLAN AND PREPARATORY MEASURES

The way in which the plan was to be implemented was explained in a circular letter from the Prime Minister to all supervisors of government services.<sup>1</sup> It covered virtually all aspects of this programme.

### 2.4.1 Staff and training

If a ministry did not have an official in charge of the archives, it was required to appoint a civil servant with the rank of central administration director who, under the authority of his/her minister, would supervise the implementation of the emergency plan in the departments of that ministry and in government-controlled establishments. In addition to the staff assigned to the archive service, an ad hoc group, representing as far as possible the different structures of the body concerned, was to be formed. It would be required to perform the technical tasks inherent in the emergency plan.

The members of this group were to have a level of education at least equivalent to that of the baccalaureate in order to be able to describe, at least summarily, the contents of the documents. They were to be assigned on a full-time basis to this plan and relieved of all other duties. The number of persons in this group was to depend on the bulk of the documents to be treated. Apart from the employees with the above-mentioned level of education, the group was to comprise workers who would carry out the tasks of cleaning and transport and who were also to be assigned full time to this operation.

The staff assigned to the technical tasks received appropriate training lasting for two weeks. That training, which was organized by the National Archives, concerned more than 200 people. The teaching corps was made up of university lecturers in library science and experienced professionals. The content of the course included the theory of modern archives administration and the practical aspects of appraising and classifying documents. This necessitated the prior preparation of forms both for the inventorying of premises and the description of documents. Those forms were standardized for government services.

Lastly, in order to motivate the staff responsible for implementing the emergency plan, who would have to work under difficult conditions, a special allowance<sup>2</sup> was granted to them during the plan's implementation phase. Government services were requested to include the necessary appropriations for this special allowance in their budgets.

### 2.4.2 Procedures and working methods

The first task to be carried out within the framework of this plan was to inventory the premises where the documents had accumulated. The inventory covered not only the buildings but also the shelving and the identification of the documents. After this operation, the premises were refurbished and cleaned so that the documents could be appraised and classified. This entailed preparing documents for destruction and others for permanent conservation.

The appraisal-classification operation took place under the supervision of the advisers working in collaboration with the working group responsible for monitoring and implementing the emergency plan at the national level. The advisers, university lecturers in library science and

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<sup>1</sup> Circular letter No. 21 of 12 April 1993, a few extracts of which appear in translation in Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> This was instituted by a presidential decree. It included allocating two hours of overtime per day over a maximum of 11 months in the year.

professional workers, gave assistance to the groups in charge of the plan's execution in the ministries and government services.

While implementing the plan, government services had at the same time to fit out premises in order to keep the documents for permanent conservation pending the completion of the new National Archives building. The remodelling of the premises was achieved with the help of the National Archives and the National Fire Brigade.

Furthermore, the emergency plan was incorporated into a national programme. This entailed preparing for public archives to be collected in the new building which was under construction, and to do so in such a way that the deposits would not be chaotic but would be based rather on the archives already constituted through the implementation of the emergency plan, since it would otherwise have been difficult for the National Archives staff to carry out the appraisal and classification of public records which had accumulated over some 40 years.

The emergency plan was to be implemented in one year. That time-limit, which might have been considered short for some ministries, was set deliberately so as to maintain pressure over a reasonable period, even if some ministries completed the plan after the deadline.



### 3. PHASES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMERGENCY PLAN

The emergency plan therefore involved inventorying the premises, cleaning them and appraising and classifying the documents so as to separate those to be preserved from those to be disposed of and, finally, remodelling appropriate repositories for the conservation of the documents.

#### 3.1 INVENTORY OF PREMISES AND DOCUMENTS

A government service that has produced documents for nearly 40 years without archiving is bound to have amassed enormous quantities, except at times when it has disposed of them arbitrarily. In addition, in the absence of specially designed repositories, makeshift storage places multiply, so that it is difficult to assess them. Indeed, in the case of Tunisia, ministries which were sufficiently in control of the situation and possessed a thorough inventory of their premises and archives were rare. Accordingly, it was necessary to take stock of the places where the documents had piled up, and to determine their size and the types and quantity of documents that they contained, so as to be able to plan the appraisal and classifying operation.

##### 3.1.1 Inventory methods

There are various methods:

- Inventory by correspondence, which entails sending out forms to those responsible for the structures of the body in question and requesting them to complete them. Apart from the risk of not receiving a reply, or not receiving the results at the right time, the quality of the inventory could, in this case, be defective, especially if the agent who draws it up has not been properly briefed.
- Inventory by means of interviews, which entails having a meeting with the person in charge and drawing up the inventory on the strength of it. The results may be immediate, but may be incomplete or incorrect for, in this type of situation, it is rare that officials are fully familiar with their institutions' archival premises.
- Physical inventory, performed directly in the places concerned by suitable staff. There is, in this case, a better chance of a satisfactory outcome.

We opted for the last method of work. The working groups for the various ministries and government bodies that were responsible for carrying out the inventory received appropriate training.

Two standardized forms were prepared, which were the subject of practical work at the training session organized for that purpose. Two types of forms were selected, one form for each of the premises and one recapitulative form for each ministry. The following information was requested:<sup>1</sup>

- Description of the premises:
  - location (geographical address);
  - type (office, depot, warehouse, store-room);
  - surface area in square metres.

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<sup>1</sup> See model in Appendix 2.

- Shelving used:
  - description of the shelving elements, their type and their storage capacity in linear metres.
- Quantity of documents:
  - evaluation of the bulk of the documents in linear metres, including shelved documents and those merely dumped.
- Identification of documents:
  - origin, department producing the document and subject by major theme (several articles);
  - extreme dates.
- Special characteristics:
  - to be mentioned in an 'observations' column  
example: unretrieved documents pertaining to another ministry, etc.

On the recapitulative form, the information requested was as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- number of premises (for the ministry's departments, and for the establishments under its supervision) and their surface area;
- quantity of documents.

It was recommended to the groups in charge of the inventory that they carry out a meticulous investigation in order to identify as many premises as possible. Initially, it was suggested that the inventory be carried out over approximately 45 days, but later it was found that this length of time was insufficient for some ministries with extensive ramifications, such as the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Agriculture. It would have been counter-productive to rush the government services and obtain unsatisfactory results.

In addition, it was planned to control the quality of the inventories through surveys on the basis of visits to the premises to verify the accuracy of the data.

Visits were carried out by advisers instructed by the Prime Minister to monitor and follow the progress of the emergency plan in the ministries.

Yet the inventory work was not always easy. Many difficulties arose. Sometimes it was necessary to clean the premises beforehand in order to separate the documents from the administration's discarded objects (old furniture, etc.). At other times, employers who were unfamiliar with the development and background of the body in question found it difficult to identify its documents, especially when they were relatively old (more than 10 or 15 years). Identification became even more difficult if the documents belonged to another department which had been abolished or relocated.

At any event, in this first phase of document identification, it is difficult to insist that the groups in charge of the inventory give many details on the origins of the documents. Mysteries will be elucidated, if need be, at the time of the description of the documents, which is a more meticulous operation. On the other hand, there is a need for rigour as regards quantity and

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<sup>1</sup> See model in Appendix 3.

classification of documents; vague wording such as ‘miscellaneous documents’ or ‘general documentation’ must be rejected. In fact, we had to reject a number of inventories which were too imprecise and did not meet the goals set. The government departments concerned were obliged to start their work afresh.

There is a need to conduct the inquiry meticulously, as it will largely determine the numbers of staff and the amount of resources to be employed in implementing the plan, as well as the work schedule. It is also necessary to collect the inventory sheets within the time-limits set, so that the data on them can be used. The case-study showed that government services which failed to hand over the inventory sheets in time to the working group in charge of the emergency plan, subsequently reported a delay in the implementation of the plan.

### 3.1.2 Use of the data

The inventory, as designed, led to the gathering of much useful information, not only for implementing the emergency plan but also for the subsequent stage, i.e. setting up a modern records and archives management system.

It was henceforward possible to know exactly what quantity of documents had been accumulated by each State body. In the case of Tunisia, the results were sometimes surprising.<sup>1</sup>

The quantity of documents was a key factor in the scheduling of the implementation of the emergency plan. Combined with the time allowed for the implementation of the plan, this information served to determine the number of people needed for this task. It is difficult, however, to establish a norm or a coefficient linking the volume of documents and the number of people needed. We shall return to this point later when we tackle the problem of document appraisal and classification.

It is also interesting to highlight the number of premises and the surface area allocated to the storing of documents, many of which have lost all usefulness and are worthless as State property. It is even more interesting to note the surface area of the premises rented, when necessary, to store this type of document. How the documents inventoried are distributed within the different structures of the same body is also a useful fact to know. Lastly, it is also important to know the age of the documents; this indicates any reductions that may have occurred through arbitrary or involuntary destruction (such as the flooding that has affected the premises of some government services).

All these facts can be found by going through the description sheets of a repository or recapitulation sheets. These facts should be brought together in a consolidated report to be submitted to the minister or head of the government service concerned. The resulting assessment will serve in the first place to alert those in charge and induce them to become aware of the seriousness of the situation. This report will be even more striking if it is accompanied by an album of photographs of the premises in question, which will then form a basis for comparison of the situation before and after the completion of the emergency plan.

The assessment or consolidated report also gives an indication of the human and material resources to be assigned to the plan. There is a need to put forward all possible arguments to induce the decision-makers to grant the necessary funds for this programme and to

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<sup>1</sup> By way of example, one ministry, with all its departments, accounted for more than 15 linear km of documents, which is equivalent to about three times the volume of the permanent archival collections in the National Archives.

acknowledge the urgency of an operation which, although temporary, offers many advantages: recovery of premises cluttered by stocks of documents that have often become outdated, decongestion of work places, improvement of the image of the government service in the eyes of the general public, and so forth.

## 3.2 DOCUMENT APPRAISAL AND CLASSIFICATION

This is the most important practical and intellectual operation to be carried out during the emergency plan. Its purpose is to separate the documents from the objects accumulated in the same premises, to identify sets of documents according to their origins and finally to separate, if only in a rough and ready manner, the documents for permanent conservation from those prepared for destruction.

### 3.2.1 Working groups

Before starting the document appraisal and classification operation, the working groups must be set up. A number of questions arise. Should a central group be formed that will visit a whole ministry, including the establishments under its supervision, or should small groups be formed in each structure? Should the members of the group work only part time for the plan, or should they be seconded full time? What is the profile of the members of these groups? How many members will each group have? What working hours should be adopted? Is there a special form of remuneration? etc.

In the case of Tunisia, we opted in most cases<sup>1</sup> for a small group in each of a ministry's different structures and in each government establishment. We did so for two reasons:

- the employees of a given structure are always in a better position than others to identify the documents generated by their own structure, and are able to describe them;
- because they are directly involved in the execution of the emergency plan, each government structure or establishment becomes aware of the consequences of the anarchic situation of the documents and of the need for an effective records management policy. They should not be led to suppose that this matter concerns another authority (in this case the National Archives) but should be made aware that they are directly concerned.

This choice implies the existence, in these different groups, of employees who have received prior training. In fact, in the Tunisian example, those persons who had taken a two-week training course before the start of the appraisal and classification operation were not properly shared out among the various government structures and establishments so as to cover all the groups that had been constituted. Different solutions were adopted to remedy this shortcoming:

- the groups in question were briefed by the adviser instructed by the Prime Minister to provide technical assistance and monitor the emergency plan in a given ministry;

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<sup>1</sup> *There was one exception, in a ministry where a group was made responsible for the reorganization of the records of the central administration, and which subsequently participated in the reorganization of the records of the establishments under its supervision located in the capital.*

- the employees who had received training instructed the other members of the working groups;
- training sessions or information days were organized for employees in the same ministry.<sup>1</sup>

The full time assignment of members of the working group to the emergency plan is more effective than their part-time assignment, in that the employee can thus concentrate more on this operation instead of being torn between the two tasks that he/she must carry out alternately in the course of the same day or throughout the week. Moreover, the example of a ministry where the assignment was on a part-time basis proved the inefficiency of this method.

To ensure the stability of the working groups, the assignment of the employees must be decided by the head of the government service, the reason being that certain offices tend to avoid the assignment of their own staff to the emergency plan, owing to a shortage of staff to perform their everyday tasks. The assignment decision must be taken by a senior official of a ministry or the head of a government establishment.

The staff in charge of the emergency plan should have two types of profile:

- labourers or unskilled workers who will carry out the cleaning and handling of goods;
- employees who will carry out the appraisal, classification and shelving of the documents.

The latter must have a level of education at least equivalent to the baccalaureate in order to be able to describe the contents of the documents and draw up the lists.

The number of persons to be assigned to the plan depends on two parameters, i.e. the volume of the documents to be processed and the time allowed for the emergency plan. According to the evaluations carried out in the case that concerns the present study, a month's work to clean up a storage area that contained 75 linear metres of documents was needed on average for a group consisting of three employees assigned to the appraisal-classification operation and two unskilled workers. The effectiveness of the group was greater when it was headed by a supervisor who had the equivalent of a Master's degree in higher education (baccalaureate and four years of university education). In any case, each group must be headed by a member who has received appropriate training, even if the other members of the group have the same level of education.

There is no doubt that the staff assigned to the emergency plan will often have to work in very difficult conditions. For greater motivation and to counteract the frustration that this difficult task may cause, it is worthwhile to introduce a special allowance for these agents during the plan. It is not only the amount of this allowance that will have an effect on the persons concerned: the gesture in itself will be perceived as adding prestige to the reorganization and conservation task, which is often wrongly regarded as degrading. As with all budgetary expenditure, the special allowance will be subject to regulations and the necessary budgetary operations.

Although a specific case, the method adopted in the Tunisian operation was edifying. The special allowance was calculated on the basis of overtime hours. But as the regulations set a quota of only 150 overtime hours per person per year, a new presidential decree was issued so as to waive this rule and enable the employees concerned to work up to 550 hours of overtime per year during the emergency plan. The effect of this exceptional measure was to come to an end on the official date for the completion of the emergency plan. This new regulation was the

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<sup>1</sup> *This solution was adopted by a large number of ministries.*

subject of two circular letters from the Prime Minister defining the implementation procedures and urging the various government services to take the necessary steps to make suitable provision in their draft budgets for the following year.

During the implementation of the plan, changes in the constitution of the working groups may occur, e.g. members may leave and others may arrive; but such mobility must not result in a change of all the group's members, since this would necessitate a resumption of training and learning and would adversely affect the work of document appraisal and classification.

### **3.2.2 Appraisal and classification techniques**

After cleaning and refurbishment of the premises, the appraisal-classification operation of all the documents collected must be carried out. It should be stated beforehand that the aim is not to conduct a definitive appraisal or classification, for the following reasons:

- this operation is carried out by unqualified persons who are unable to perform it according to the techniques in use in this sphere and who, often, are not sufficiently familiar with the structures of the body in question;
- there are no standards (appraisal chart or conservation timetable) which would make a systematic appraisal possible, since such tools take a long time to become established, in addition to the need for sound experience of archives administration;
- a methodical classification would also require research and documentation on the specific tasks and forms of organization of the document-producing services.

Accordingly, this appraisal and classification operation aims at achieving the following:

- separate the files and archival documents, on the one hand, from library and documentation service documents, on the other;
- weed out the documents that are in an advanced state of deterioration for disposal;
- gather together the documents on the basis of the structures of a single ministry or government establishment;
- identify briefly the contents of the documents in the description units which are to contain many documents (files, boxes or even a group of boxes), at the same time proposing:
  - destruction of documents which do not visibly contain information rendering them eligible for permanent conservation;
  - permanent conservation for the remaining documents;
- store the documents properly in conditions conducive to the conservation.

We shall endeavour to develop the various points mentioned above. In many cases, the depots that housed the documents also served to store various kinds of objects such as discarded furniture, spare furniture, technical equipment, etc. The reorganization of those premises therefore consisted in ridding them of all items superfluous to the documents themselves.

The first appraisal, then, consists in separating archives from other documents. In fact, the government services which disencumber themselves of their documents do not distinguish between files and archive papers proper and other documentary material such as books, periodicals and reviews. Sometimes printed matter, unused envelopes and even other stationery are found mixed up with the documents.

Documentary materials other than archives may, in some cases, be channelled into the appropriate library or documentation units, whether in the body concerned or elsewhere. If they are of little interest, they will be disposed of through recycling or sold to second-hand booksellers, as appropriate. 'The gazette' in which governmental decrees are published may be given special treatment. If copies of this publication are numerous, annual collections can be constituted to be used by different branches of the same body. Special attention will be paid to what is customarily called 'grey literature' or 'administrative documentation', i.e. studies, surveys and other works produced by the civil service and distributed on a fairly limited scale.

The first appraisal operation therefore consists in reconstituting sets of archival records. However, in view of the often anarchic way in which the documents have been deposited, it is not easy to lay hands immediately on the documents of a single department or structure. Hence the appraisal must be carried out according to the structures of a single ministry or government body, in accordance with the principle of source. Thus, by gathering together documents on this principle in all the premises where they have been stored, we shall be able to reconstitute archive groups.

This initial classification must precede any operation of document description or summary of records, since it is more convenient to produce a document description after an appraisal has been carried out on the basis of origin. The standardized lists prepared for the description of the documents according to origin<sup>1</sup> are of two kinds: lists of documents for permanent conservation and lists of documents for disposal. The description operation therefore works in conjunction with an appraisal to classify the two categories of documents.

Appraisal and description of documents are the most sensitive archival operations. Since they will be carried out by relatively unqualified persons, any disposal of documents not authorized by the National Archives must be prohibited, so as to prevent the illicit destruction of certain documents. The description of the documents, whether they are proposed for permanent conservation or for disposal, is carried out at the level of each set of premises and separately for each service producing them. It is made up of the following components:

- a serial number for each item or description unit. The item is usually a box of standard size: (35 cm x 25 cm x 10 cm) or a bundle;
- the subject of the documents included in the description unit or item. The description must be brief: it is not necessary to go into details of files or papers;
- extreme dates: the earliest and the latest year of issue of the documents figuring in the description;
- a column is set aside for comments where particulars concerning the documents may be given, such as the type of medium, form, state of preservation, etc.

The quality of the description must be checked by senior specialists. This verification must take place without fail at the beginning of the operation, and every time that new staff are assigned to the emergency plan.

The document description makes it possible to identify the documents and also to reconstitute the holdings of the different services. Identification will probably help to highlight certain documents whose primary value is still high and which could, on occasion, serve the purposes of the government department. However, the main purpose of identification will be to prepare for the transfer of the documents to the National Archives.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendices 4 and 5.

Since there is a heavy backlog, it is preferable by means of this emergency plan to carry out a primary appraisal and to give even a brief description, so that documents deposited subsequently obey minimum rules of organization and are not transferred in disorder. Otherwise, the staff of the National Archives will spend a considerable amount of time sorting them, both physically and logically. Most countries are not so fortunate as to have enough archive staff to cope with such an accumulation.

The appraisal and description of the documents therefore results in the identification of two groups of documents: those proposed for permanent conservation and those proposed for destruction.

### **3.2.3 Destruction of documents**

Tunisian legislation is unequivocal on the disposal of public archives, which can be carried out only on the advice and under the technical supervision of the National Archives. Government services therefore cannot dispose of documents without having completed the necessary formalities. The lists of documents proposed for destruction are sent for endorsement to the National Archives.

Under the emergency plan, it was initially suggested that there should be no destruction until the plan had been completed. However, it later transpired that by following this rule many government services had become encumbered in the very process of the appraisal and shelving of documents which had hitherto been left in disorder. To relieve the congestion of the premises and to allow the plan to continue, it was decided to dispose of the most severely damaged documents, i.e. documents which had become irretrievable owing to their advanced state of deterioration (very often due to flooding, damp premises or long exposure to the sun). Other categories of documents can be disposed of without delay, especially documents on financial management whose drafting dates back more than ten years, to which no requirements any longer apply, and which are not consolidated documents. Certain documents on personnel management can also be destroyed. The disposal of documentation and library material was mentioned in paragraph 3.2.2 above.

Disposal thus authorized and carried out is a reliable means of relieving government services and enabling them to manage their premises more effectively. They can thus keep to the work schedules.

## **3.3 SCHEDULING AND MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMERGENCY PLAN**

Given that most ministries did not have archive services and were not equipped to implement the emergency plan appropriately from a technical point of view, it was decided to set up a team of professionals, documentation specialists and university lecturers in library science to be responsible for monitoring and more effective planning of the work.

### **3.3.1 Technical assistance and monitoring the progress of the work**

The members of this team were required by the Prime Minister, under contract and in accordance with terms of reference, to provide technical assistance to the working groups set up in the government services to implement the emergency plan. For each ministry, an adviser was appointed to manage the establishments under its supervision. In some cases, one adviser took care of two ministries. In others, owing to the scale of the administrative machinery in



certain ministries, two advisers were appointed in each. The ministers were officially notified by the Prime Minister of the appointment and the assignment of the advisers.

Meanwhile, the central group that had carried out the preliminary study and proposed the emergency plan was made responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring it at the national level. The group's assignment was as follows:

- raise awareness among the senior officials in the ministries;
- monitor the advisers' action;
- centralize investigation of technical questions and procedures as required by the implementation of the plan;
- report to the authorities on the progress of the plan and the difficulties encountered so that the public authorities could take appropriate decisions.

The advisers spent on average two half-days per week with the working groups and travelled to government services located outside the capital. They explained to the employees concerned how to carry out the appraisal and classification operation, and, when necessary, hosted awareness-building or training sessions. They verified the lists established for the description of the documents to ensure that this important operation was technically sound.

The advisers' task was indirectly one of monitoring. It was through the reports that they drew up every two months on average, as well as the meetings which they held on that occasion with the central working group, that the Prime Minister's authorities were able to keep track of the plan's progress in the various government services.

Those meetings were propitious occasions for discussing specific or general questions raised by the execution of the emergency plan.

The advisers' periodic reports underscored the quantity of documents processed, their percentage in relation to their initial volume, the difficulties encountered and the operations concerned with the cleaning and ordering of the premises for the conservation of the documents. These reports also mentioned the working sessions held by the advisers with the groups carrying out the appraisal and classification as well as the visits they made to the interior of the country that would serve to justify their special allowance.

Besides the regular meetings with the advisers, the central working group had occasion to intercede directly with the principal private secretaries or secretaries-general in some ministries to find a solution in cases where difficulties had been pointed out. At the same time, the group carried out verification and inspection assignments, especially in the interior of the country. These assignments were the subject of reports addressed to the authorities concerned.

At the same time, the central group organized fairly regular meetings with those in charge of the implementation of the emergency plan in the ministries so as to explain the procedures for executing the plan and the measures or decisions that had been taken for that purpose (inventory of premises and documents, special allowance for employees working within the framework of the plan, scheduling of the work, etc.).

The tasks of monitoring and follow-up proved to be both highly sensitive and essential. It is not always easy to harmonize some 20 ministries and hundreds of government establishments. The diversity of the situations to be managed calls for availability, dedication and know-how. Often those in charge of the plan at the level of ministries do not find their supervisors sufficiently understanding and receptive for the plan to be executed smoothly. In other cases,

the financial services are not over-zealous in meeting the plan's implementation needs or do not earmark enough funds for the purpose.

The monitoring and follow-up of the execution of the emergency plan must be based on a work schedule.

### **3.3.2 Scheduling the work**

For a number of reasons, a target date should be set for the work to be executed in each ministry and government establishment. The words 'emergency plan' imply that the tasks in question are to be carried out within a definite time frame. Since the emergency plan is part of a national strategy for the organization of public archives, it must be kept to specific deadlines.

A single deadline must be set for all government services, even if they prefer variable target dates chosen according to their own assessments.

As regards the case selected for this study, the time frame set was 18 months (from July 1993 to the end of December 1994). In fact, on the strength of the inventories that had already been drawn up prior to the beginning of the appraisal and classification operation, we knew that the time allowed would not be sufficient for a number of ministries which consisted of several structures, such as the Ministries of Finance, National Economy and Agriculture. But it was better to adjust the deadline on the basis of the time necessary for implementing the plan by a majority of government services, even if a minority completed the plan after the specified time-limit.

The Prime Minister fixed the deadline in a circular letter sent to ministers so as to give it a binding character. It should be said that at the outset the emergency plan was not to have exceeded one year, but in view of its late start in many ministries, the deadline was extended by six months. The beginning actually coincided with the summer season, which is an annual holiday period for many civil servants and during which the official working hours are reduced to a single daily session.

Once the deadline has been set, each ministry and government service must schedule the work to be carried out within the time allowed. Admittedly, this is not a straightforward operation, since several factors are involved, namely, the quantity of documents, the number of premises to be refurbished and their geographical location (the staff must take turns to travel to the premises located away from the administration's headquarters), the number of people assigned to the emergency plan, the quality of their work and especially their productivity.

For all those reasons, it was not possible to ask for the schedule to be drawn up immediately after the start of the emergency plan. It was only a few months into the operation that the same circular letter from the Prime Minister was sent to government services requesting them to draw up a schedule. Standard forms were prepared for that purpose and had to be filled in and returned to the National Archives, about six weeks after the dispatch of the circular letter. The government services probably gained from the experience already acquired in carrying out the various operations, but they encountered a number of difficulties in drawing up a precise schedule, chief among which were:

- the lack of objective standards by which to gauge the productivity of the task of appraisal and classification;

- the impossibility of knowing precisely what proportion of the documents should be preserved and what proportion disposed of, when contemplating the documents assembled in bulk;
- the possibility of coming across other documents which had not been entered in the existing inventory.

Of course, the scheduling forms should none the less not be filled in carelessly or regarded as a mere formality. In any case, the schedule will serve as a management chart for the person in charge of the plan's implementation, even if it has to be adjusted more than once.

However, one serious matter was observed in that, in some cases, the scheduling forms were filled in on the basis of the deadline set for the plan's completion and not on the basis of the two important parameters already cited, namely, the number of persons assigned and the quantity of documents to be dealt with. Thanks to the advisers' two-monthly report, however, this was noticed and it was ascertained that the plan's execution did not match the schedule. As a result, in these cases, the emergency plan was in danger of not being completed on time. It is wiser and more realistic to set time-limits for the plan's completion on the basis of a ministry's real possibilities, specifically in the light of the two parameters mentioned above and taking into account the material resources available.

### **3.4 MATERIAL RESOURCES AND REMODELLING OF PREMISES**

Apart from the working groups and their supervisors, the implementation of such a programme requires specific material resources and the remodelling of premises.

#### **3.4.1 Policy on material resources**

Before reviewing the material resources that the implementation of an emergency plan necessitates, it will be useful to describe the policy following in the Tunisian case.

It should be stated first that the few archive services which existed in ministries and government bodies did not have clearly defined budgets. They depended upon the good will and inclination of the finance departments and the officials with power to authorize expenditure. The funds therefore allocated to the 'archive' function were derisory, yet the execution of the emergency plan called for the mobilization of more substantial funds than the administration proposed to grant.

The policy followed to procure the requisite funding was based on different methods, i.e. legislative controls, planning and restriction of resources. In order to set up a system of special remuneration, it was necessary to go beyond the legislation in force, which permitted only a small special allowance. The only possible choice, in fact, was to attribute to staff members an aggregate of 150 hours of overtime per year. A presidential decree was issued to introduce a more favourable system, applicable exclusively during the emergency plan to the staff members who were assigned to it.

It does not always suffice to have official regulations if the necessary conditions for their enforcement are not met. Indeed, this decree was published at a time when the budgets had already been voted. Planning is therefore needed in order to obtain the requisite funding by following the proper procedures for preparing the State budget. This entails including appropriations in the draft budgets (both for management and for equipment) to cover the corresponding expenses. The requests made must be justified to the authorities concerned by

discussion of draft budgets and by their adoption. This procedure must be followed by all government services. Decision-makers must therefore be won over beforehand and must endorse such an approach.

It is more expedient that each service should devote a proportion of its budget to the emergency plan, however small, than that funds should be concentrated on a single institution, in this case the National Archives. This makes government services more accountable. It should be pointed out that, in the case that concerns us, an overall appropriation was provided by the Prime Minister to pay the groups in charge of monitoring and co-ordinating the emergency plan's implementation.

A third aspect of the policy on financial resources is the appropriate use of available funds. As it is strategically important to make a success of the emergency plan, it must not fail for lack of financial resources. It is consequently important to be able to make the best use of the resources available: to retrieve boxes containing documents to be disposed of, to repair broken boxes, to resort to the use of bundles if there is a scarcity of boxes, and to install inexpensive temporary shelving (wooden if necessary), etc. This course can be followed until planning of financial resources yields favourable results and the sensitization campaign leads to fuller awareness of the importance of archives.

In fact, the operation of reorganization, appraisal and classification of documents in itself does not need as much financial input as the purchase of equipment and the remodelling of premises for use as archives.

### **3.4.2 Equipment and remodelling of premises**

The anarchic accumulation of documents had been compounded by neglect of the premises which housed them, so that documents were continually piling up in the premises which did not meet the requirements for their proper conservation. Given the lack of appropriate premises in most government services, the emergency plan scheduled the fitting out of new premises. Each ministry and government body was required, by the end of the reorganization operation, to fit out a repository for the conservation of its documents and archives. This remodelling had to be approved by the National Archives and the fire brigade.

It should be said that this measure was also in line with strategic options in national policies on archives. It was decided that government services would keep their intermediate archives under their authority and would transfer only their definitive archives to the National Archives. Each government service had to fit out a repository for that purpose.

The National Archives provided a technical adviser to help government services with this task. It was necessary to study the functionality of the premises, the layout of the shelving, safety matters, etc. Owing to the lack of specialists in the government services, the National Archives provided technical assistance free of charge upon request. There is a need to teach decision-makers a number of rules of conduct. As decision-makers are not accustomed to investing in this kind of premises, it is important that they be shown that this type of investment is neither superfluous nor unproductive, since fitting out a repository according to established standards is more worth while than allocating several premises without modernizing them. Similarly, the accumulation of documents scattered throughout several offices takes up space that could be used by employees as work places. The organization of documents also helps to improve the image of government services in the eyes of the general public.

The modernization of archive repositories must take into account certain rules so as to:

- separate areas reserved for storage from those intended as work places for archives staff;
- provide suitable working conditions in the premises set aside for the staff;
- guarantee minimum conditions for the proper conservation of documents, with appropriate humidity and temperature controls;
- make the premises safe against fire, flood (especially if they include a cellar) and theft.

Regulations must provide for the approval of the National Archives prior to any modernization of premises, and particularly if it involves the construction of new buildings, so as to be able to apply the requisite standards and prevent any wastage or inappropriate construction work.<sup>1</sup> The slight experience gained from the construction of archive buildings during the implementation of the emergency plan, revealed a loophole in the legislation on public buildings. As a result, it was envisaged to propose a draft decree to make it compulsory to provide for archive repositories in all plans for administrative buildings and to consult the National Archives on this type of project.

Besides the modernization of premises, the emergency plan calls for the provision of equipment, especially shelving. The policy followed in this regard is to use all available means, including the recycling of old items, until practices become established in the civil service and greater investments can be made in this field. When those in charge see the improvement in the archive situation with modernized premises and documents on shelves, this will induce them to invest more resources in archives and records management.

Another of the policy's aims as regards funding was to resist the preconceived idea that the organization of documents was an expensive operation. The investment that it actually requires is not heavy, apart from the funds needed to acquire and equip premises. This investment, however, pays dividends over a long period. Decision-makers must be shown how the organization of documents results, on the contrary, in gains for the administration through a more rational use of premises and equipment.

Handling the emergency plan therefore calls for a management team well versed in administrative practices and sound management, with archives administration at their fingertips. It means being very familiar with the workings of the civil service and with the habits and outlook of those in charge, and knowing just how to raise awareness, by convincing and carry one's point. All these requirements play a part in bringing the emergency plan to a successful conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> *I would cite the case of the construction of an archives building by a public company which, without taking advice from the National Archives, contacted an architect who had clearly never had to build an archives building. The building was constructed on the basis of a self-supporting structure, a technique long considered inadvisable.*

#### **4. EMERGENCY PLAN AND NATIONAL POLICY ON RECORDS AND ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT**

The emergency plan is to be incorporated in a comprehensive programme to set up a national records and archives management system. To ensure that it serves its purpose within this programme, however, it must first be brought to fruition and finalized.

##### **4.1 FINALIZING THE EMERGENCY PLAN**

Bearing in mind that the main aim of an emergency plan is to stop the anarchic accumulation of documents and deal with backlog, it is important to assess the operation and measure how far the objectives set have been achieved.

##### **4.1.1 Appraisal and evaluation of the emergency plan**

Evaluation is indeed part of good management, but it is also required for the preparation of the future phase of the reorganization operation, which consists in setting up a records and archives management system that will forestall any relapse into the same situation of breakdown as before. The evaluation should focus on:

- quantitative results: determine the volume of documents sorted and processed summarily in relation to the initial volume, indicating the percentage of documents destroyed after the first appraisal;
- fitting out of premises: indicate whether the government services have already fitted out a repository suitable for the conservation of documents and whether they have taken back into use premises or areas where documents had accumulated;
- staff: indicate the number of specialists and non-specialists assigned to the records and archives management service in government bodies;
- financial resources: it is useful to know what funds are made available for the emergency plan in each government service;
- quality of the work: gauge the results of the appraisal-classification operation and the relevance of reconstituting archival collections according to the principle of source;
- the willingness of government services to complete the necessary stages in setting up a records and archives management system: judge how far those in charge are convinced of the need for such an undertaking and how willing they are to grant the necessary human and material resources.

It is useful to carry out an evaluation of the emergency plan at two levels. The first level is that of the advisers who have supervised the implementation of the plan in the government services and who are in a position to determine the quality of the work carried out. The other level is that of the supervisors of government services. The evaluation that they will have to submit to the authorities of the country may induce them to acknowledge the results achieved and thereby ensure the continuation of the programme. This twofold evaluation will make it possible to obtain comprehensive information and to correct, if necessary, any tendency on the part of heads of government services to overestimate the scale of the results.

In the case in hand, the evaluation operation showed that the results were satisfactory on the whole, but uneven. Some ministries were unable to complete the emergency plan in time.

An extra period of three to four months was granted to them and the advisers' mission was extended. Examination of the emergency plan's results at both levels must lead to meticulous

follow-up in order to put the finishing touches to the plan in each government service. It would be useful if the archival authority could indicate, to each service which has not completed the plan, the operations still to be carried out with a view to attaining all the objectives set by the emergency plan. The final evaluation report on the emergency plan, together with a critical assessment, should be submitted to the highest possible authority so as to review the results and outline the phases still to be completed.

Finalization of the emergency plan concerns not only the completion of the tasks of reorganization and appraisal-classification, but also the conservation of the documents retained.

#### **4.1.2 Collecting and organizing the documents retained**

It should be recalled that the main objective of the emergency plan is to conserve the documents that have accumulated chaotically and to halt the process that led to this type of situation. It is therefore necessary to collect the documents in question after the completion of the emergency plan. Collecting the documents is contingent upon the organization of the archives in a given country and the types of obstruction that previously interfered with such organization. We are thus faced with two critical situations: the accumulation of documents which have been neither appraised nor transferred because of the non-existence or the saturation of the archive buildings, or else documents which have accumulated in spite of the existence of buildings.

In the first case, the emergency plan must be backed by the construction or acquisition of a building to conserve the archives. Otherwise, if the newly sorted documents still continue to be the responsibility of the services that produce them, they may relapse into a state of neglect and abandonment.

The allocation of a building must therefore be scheduled immediately after the completion of the emergency plan or, at the very least, after a period of about two years.

In the second case, the emergency plan must be accompanied by a programme to eliminate obstructions and remove the constraints that prevent the normal archiving of public records, whether this be the absence of legislation requiring the collection of public archives or a lack of political will to accomplish this task. That a public authority should refuse to organize archives in the public interest constitutes the worst affront that can be inflicted upon the profession. It is not surprising to come across regimes which are unwilling to admit that contemporary archives should be opened to the public, even after a respectable lapse of time. In such cases, the archival authority would be well advised to proceed cautiously and heighten awareness among decision-makers.

Apart from the problems of premises, the collecting of the documents safeguarded by the emergency plan raises a number of questions of archives administration and, more specifically, the questions of document appraisal and disposal policy and the classification and organization of the holdings constituted.

During the execution of the emergency plan, the appraisal carried out is preliminary. Accordingly, the documents retained must be subjected to a final appraisal. In the absence of appraisal charts or conservation schedules, this operation becomes delicate. There are two possibilities. One is to carry out even a rough and ready appraisal and to use its findings as a basis for drawing up appraisal charts. The other is to conduct a temporary appraisal pending the production of appraisal charts. In fact, in both cases an evaluation of the documents should

be carried out to determine the final arrangements to be made for them. This process is necessary in order to work out a proper conservation schedule for the documents of a given body during their life-cycle. One can, incidentally, combine both solutions by using the disposal lists as a factor for drawing up a conservation schedule and provide for temporary disposal until the final preparation of these instruments.

In the case in hand, it was indeed decided to defer the final disposal and get up a national research programme for the organization of retrieved archives. This programme, directed by the National Archives, consists of forming groups of specialists, including in particular academics, who will be required to decide upon the secondary value of the documents and hence the arrangements for their permanent conservation or their destruction. These groups can later go on to use the documents for research in accordance with programmes set up by the relevant bodies or individual projects.

The second major question of archives administration raised by the collecting of archive holdings is that of the classification system. In fact, in our case, the documents produced during the period of the French Protectorate (1881-1956) had previously been archived according to a classification framework composed of 'series'.<sup>1</sup> That framework is not valid for the period of the country's independence. It was therefore suggested that a new classification system be worked out that would be better suited to contemporary archives. However, it is not usually necessary, at the time of implementing the emergency plan, to adopt a new classification system, especially if the existing system is functional and if there has been no historical change of direction that may have engendered the constitution of new holdings.

The emergency plan thus made it possible to get rid of blockages by reordering archives, the method of collecting them and their organization. To ensure that such a breakdown will never recur, the obstructions must be eliminated by setting up a national system of records and archives management.

## **4.2 NATIONAL SYSTEM OF RECORDS AND ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT**

It is not our intention to give a full description either of the national policy that ought to be implemented on records and archives management, or of the machinery of the national system to be set up. Much has already been written on this subject.<sup>2</sup> We have merely been concerned to review the policy followed for making use of such a system in the case that is the subject of the present study. Admittedly, some data may be specific to this case, but the experiment that was carried out may be instructive from the point of view of the procedure followed to win over decision-makers and set up the machinery to bring such a system into operation.

### **4.2.1 Justification of the system**

A national system of records and archives management must, let us remember, concern itself with documents from their first printing to their final destination, i.e. either destruction or permanent conservation.

This involves planning the production of documents, organizing their use during their life-cycle and conserving what deserves to be kept for posterity so that they can be used for scientific research and to enhance the country's heritage. Documents therefore have twofold value:

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<sup>1</sup> *'Series' here means a division in the classification framework according to the method in use in France.*

<sup>2</sup> *The most significant studies are mentioned in the attached bibliography.*



- primary value: this resides in the reasons for the document's production and remains valid during the period when the document is in frequent use, but becomes occasional when it passes to the stage of intermediate archives;
- secondary or usage value by virtue of purposes other than those for which the document was created and which may have to do with either information or heritage.

The records and archives management system is justified by the important role of documents in underpinning the work of government services in managing the country's affairs and its integral development. Administrative documents, easily retrievable, constitute an appreciable source of information for the planning of the country's development and for the authorities' decision-making machinery. If they are well organized, the documents used during the day-to-day management of the country's affairs facilitate the government services' action, improve their efficiency and enhance their prestige in the eyes of the general public.

The aim is to empower the civil service to provide citizens promptly with the high-quality services to which they are entitled. Moreover, administrative documents are also a source of information for follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of government services' work. Hence it becomes possible not only to rectify or correct, if necessary, the policy that a country follows, but also to make public authorities accountable for their actions and to enforce 'the rule of law and institutions'.

The heritage value of archives is no less important. Archives constitute a basis for national sovereignty and identity, bearing witness to the actions and achievements of the authorities and keeping a record of scientific, artistic and literary activity in every country. The cultural identity of developing countries is increasingly threatened by the creeping uniformity, worldwide, of cultural productions and their dissemination by satellite broadcasting, digitalization and computer networks. Of course, this standardization brings benefits, but developing countries whose contribution to it is infinitesimally small would be well advised to receive it with full confidence in their own mature cultural, linguistic and moral identity rather than to reject it or submit to it in an involuntary and unregulated manner.

In the quest for national and cultural identity, young people and the not so young find a treasure-trove in their countries' archives. The heritage dimension of archives must be cultivated so as to reconcile a country's citizens with both their recent and their distant past. Every society needs to establish and assert itself and display its identity, and only thus can its receptive interaction with other civilizations be beneficial and rewarding.

To justify the need for a national system of records and archives management, decision-makers must be confronted with a range of arguments. However, it should be observed that, as a rule, decision-makers are often more receptive to arguments stressing the effectiveness and immediate advantages of the organization of current documents than to arguments in favour of the heritage value of archives. Hence it is possible to obtain the necessary decisions for such an undertaking in the knowledge that, through the organization of the life-cycle of current and semi-current documents, the organization and conservation of definitive archives can easily be achieved thereafter.

It is therefore worth while to point out the gains to which the organization of civil service documents gives rise, whether in terms of time, thanks to swift and reliable access to information, or in terms of space, equipment and staff. On one occasion a decision-maker was won over after learning that his services were renting warehouses to store documents that had been obsolete for many years. Other decision-makers were also convinced after an operation to organize the documents and files in their own offices.

Awareness campaigns must sway not only decision-makers but also the general public and the country's political authorities. In this respect, the media can play a leading role. For example, a televised report on the situation of archives, which was broadcast on a highly-rated television programme in the country of our study, had a very favourable impact. The success of the awareness campaign is sure to facilitate the establishment of the system in question.

#### 4.2.2 Devising and setting up the system

Once a records and archives management system has been devised, its setting up requires an appropriate environment in the form of legislation, structures, qualified staff and material resources. In our present case-study, the legislative framework is fairly complete and includes a law and three implementation decrees. The problem that arose was more a failure of implementation in practice.

The emergency plan presented an opportunity to supplement this legislation by another decree setting out the responsibility for keeping administrative documents in the various types of government service (ministries, State establishments and enterprises, local authorities, etc.). Thus, where the legislative framework does not exist, it should be created, since it is necessary for the establishment of a records and archives management system. Under such a system, responsibilities are determined, missions defined and prerogatives and working procedures laid down. The legislation must outline the policy to be embarked upon on as regards the management of documents throughout their life-cycle and also the nature and the organization of the administrative structures that will be responsible for them.

These structures should be composed of a central body, with a leadership mission, and appropriate units for each government service. It is for the central body to lay down the national policy on records and archives management and to monitor its implementation. The documents management units in the government services will be required to implement the national policy adopted in this field as it applies to all government services and will have to plan and execute programmes for documents specific to various services.

In the case in hand, the central structure is provided by the National Archives acting as a government institution enjoying legal status and financial autonomy. Since it reports directly to the Prime Minister, it has the necessary authority to carry out its mission at national level. As regards units qualified in the management of documents in government services, these are not in place everywhere. One of the measures that the programme for the implementation of the records management system will include is that of completing the establishment of this type of unit in all government services. In addition, the advisory body, the 'Conseil supérieur des archives', which has existed since 1988, was restructured by a decree in order to lay down national policy in this field more effectively.<sup>1</sup>

Given the lack of qualified professionals in records management and in order to help government services to equip themselves with operational units, a training course was introduced. Its purpose is to train, over one year, applicants holding a Master's degree<sup>2</sup> (diploma obtained after four years of university education) in records and archives

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<sup>1</sup> *This Council, which is now presided over by the Prime Minister, is made up of ten or so ministers, specifically those who manage the sovereignty departments. It also comprises a technical committee, made up of professionals and users, which prepares and appraises the files that are brought before the Council.*

<sup>2</sup> *The training provided on this course is designed as a stop-gap measure. It will continue for a few years only, until government services constitute the nuclei of competent services in this field.*

management. The training of teams of professionals is therefore very valuable when it comes to establishing a records and archives management system.

At the time of writing, the emergency plan described in this study had also just come to an end. But a second plan is already in preparation. Its purpose is to organize public records by instituting classification systems and drawing up conservation schedules. The procedure to be adopted will be as follows:

- (a) a working group will supervise the operation at the national level, as was done during the implementation of the emergency plan;
- (b) multidisciplinary working groups will be required to devise:
  - classification systems for records which are common to government services, especially those concerned with general administration and the management of staff, finances and the property of those services;
  - conservation schedules for those common records;
- (c) a working group, or a commission, for each government service, will have to devise:
  - a classification system for records specific to that government service;
  - a conservation schedule for records specific to that government service.

This technique will tend to ensure uniformity in classification techniques and procedures as well as in rules to be observed concerning the time-limits on the conservation of common public records. It will also make government services more accountable by being put in charge of the programme for their specific documents. The implementation of this whole programme will take into account the country's specific circumstances, administrative practices and traditions, and its legislation, including legal stipulations regarding the conservation of documents, etc. But it must learn from other countries' experience. Already, tools such as appraisal charts and conservation schedules are starting to be collected. In addition, the process of organizing documents has begun in a number of State enterprises and the National Archives have already approved two conservation schedules.

The implementation of this plan will probably be extended over a period ranging from three to five years. It will therefore mobilize all government services and require their participation at all levels.

So it is important that all the necessary conditions be met for the success of this important operation. Ideally, the country's highest executive authority should monitor such an undertaking.

## CONCLUSION

In each country, the policy adopted on records and archives management reflects the importance that decision-makers attach to this field.

The uneven development of this area throughout the world illustrates the varying degree of interest that is taken in it and also the differences in the material and historical backgrounds of the countries.

In countries where this sector has not been properly developed owing to various kinds of malfunction, an emergency plan combined with a recovery programme may be effective. The case of the emergency plan examined in this study proves the importance of such an approach in getting rid of the backlog which has accumulated in this field and in creating fresh impetus that will result in the establishment of a modern system of records and archives management. This type of plan affords an opportunity to mobilize all the structures of the public service. The state of mobilization - sustained by the 'urgent' nature of the operation - is conducive to a maximum growth of awareness among decision-makers and those in charge of government services and to the introduction of the necessary reforms for the establishment of a records and archives management system.

For the success of such an undertaking, a number of conditions must be met:

- the support of decision-makers;
- the mobilization of supervisors of government services;
- a good team of professionals capable of devising programmes of action for every stage of the process.

**APPENDICES**

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## APPENDIX 1

### Extracts from the circular letter from the Prime Minister (of Tunisia), No. 21 of 12 April 1993, concerning the emergency plan for the organization of administrative records and archives

#### 1. Objectives of the emergency plan

The purpose of the aforementioned emergency plan is to regularize the present accumulation of administrative records and archives in administrative buildings and repositories of various kinds. In particular, it is intended to disencumber the documents of all superfluous items and subsequently to work towards the establishment of a records and archives management system that complies with the existing laws and regulations.

This plan concerns all services administered by the State, local authorities and public institutions and enterprises.

#### 2. Practical measures

- (a) Each ministry shall appoint a high-ranking official with the rank of director of central administration who shall, under the authority of his/her ministry, be responsible for the implementation of the emergency plan in the services of the ministry concerned and in the public establishments under its responsibility.
- (b) Each ministry shall appoint a working group to draw up an exhaustive inventory of the buildings and repositories which contain administrative records and archives and which come under its authority or that of the public establishments placed under its control. That exhaustive inventory should:
  - indicate for each repository its type, location and surface area;
  - mention the different types of documents accumulated and their state of preservation;
  - assess the total quality of documents.
- (c) Each ministry shall set up a working group to be responsible for the appraisal and classification of the accumulated documents and archives in all the buildings and repositories concerned. The members of these working groups shall be category 'B' personnel (having a level of education equivalent to the baccalaureate) and shall be assigned to the above-mentioned work for the duration of the emergency plan. The number of persons to be included in these groups shall be specified jointly by the official in charge of the emergency plan and the Director of the National Archives.

The members of these groups shall receive appropriate training for a period of two weeks at the National School of Administration; that training shall be conducted under the supervision of the National Archives.

The working groups may be assisted by unskilled workers in carrying out the tasks entailed by the implementation of the emergency plan.

- (d) In collaboration with the National Archives, each ministry shall draw up a schedule for the operations of appraisal and classification of all the accumulated documents.
- (e) While the appraisal and classification of the documents are taking place, the repositories must be remodelled to store the documents proposed for permanent conservation.

pending their transfer to the National Archives. The repositories shall be approved by the National Archives and the National Fire Brigade.

- (f) Following authorization by the National Archives, the documents for disposal shall be destroyed within two months following the completion of the emergency plan, in accordance with the approved methods and under the technical supervision of the National Archives.

### **3. Remuneration for work carried out under the emergency plan**

With a view to ensuring that all the operations relating to the implementation of the emergency plan proceed smoothly, the ministries, local authorities, public institutions and public enterprises shall be authorized to permit employees assigned to the implementation of the emergency plan to receive an allowance for special work in accordance with the procedures in force.

### **4. Co-ordinating and monitoring the execution of the emergency plan**

A team appointed by the Prime Minister shall be responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring the execution of the emergency plan for the re-ordering of administrative records and archives.

**APPENDIX 2**

**DOCUMENT INVENTORY FORM (PER REPOSITORY)**

Ministry:

or

Establishment:

| Repository:<br>identification | Storage facilities,<br>description and<br>capacity | Volume of documents<br>in linear metres | Document description<br>(description unit<br>and subject) | Extreme<br>dates | Producing<br>service |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|------------------|----------------------|
|                               |  |   |   |                  |                      |



**APPENDIX 3**

**INVENTORY OF DOCUMENTS: RECAPITULATION**

Ministry:

or

Body:

| Producing services and subsidiary bodies | Repositories:<br>number and total surface area | Storage facilities:<br>total capacity | Volume of documents<br>in linear metres | Observations |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|--------------|
|  |  |                                       |   |              |

**APPENDIX 4**

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS PROPOSED FOR PERMANENT CONSERVATION**

Ministry:

Repository:

or

Body:

Producing service:

| Number of description units | Document description (subject, type, etc.) | Extreme dates of documents | Volume or quantity of documents | Observations |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
|                             |  |                            |                                 |              |

**APPENDIX 5**

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS PROPOSED FOR DISPOSAL**

| Number of description units | Document description (subject, type, etc.) | Extreme dates of documents | Volume or quantity of documents | Observations |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
|                             |  |                            |                                 |              |

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