

The International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen

Task: The International Tracing Service (ITS) was created to search for missing persons and *to collect, to classify, to preserve and to evaluate* records on Germans and non-Germans detained in National Socialist concentration or labour camps or on non-Germans deported in consequence of World War II. By analogy with the Bonn Agreements of 1955, the ITS supplies information, upon individual request, to the former civilian NS-persecutees themselves, their legal successors respectively restitution and pension authorities. The certificates issued by the ITS under the emblem of the Red Cross are accepted worldwide without being certified by a lawyer.

History: Founded in 1943 at the British Red Cross, which transformed the section for International Affairs into a search bureau. Move to Arolsen in January 1946. From May 1955, the ITS has been an international institution under the direction and administration of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. It is supervised by an International Commission for the International Tracing Service (IC/ITS) which 11 states, the Federal Republic of Germany included, are members of.

Humanitarian Mandate

Topical figures stock of documents: The ITS preserves more than 25,900 linear metres of material (lined up vertically sheet to sheet). This material comprises about 50 million individual pieces of information for approximately 17.5 million persons. The index, which is arranged in an alphabetical-phonetic order, has been digitized, and the information contained in it is available in a database for an accelerated evaluation.

Present endeavours: Still today (in 2006: approximately 53 linear metres), the ITS gathers new material at inhabitants' registration offices, archives, firms etc., since the fall of the wall much information hereof on the territory of the five new federal states and, for quite a long time, from pension insurance carriers.

Objective: Thanks to the endeavours undertaken in numerous countries in the document acquisition field, the ITS continues to be successful with replying to some more than 50 % of the inquiries favourably. A result that, despite the increasing distance to the events – and the more and more imprecise indications furnished by more and more aged inquirers as a consequence – is to be held.

Topical figures evaluative field: In 2006, 244,364 inquiries reached the ITS. 280,311 replies were sent out. The backlog of inquiries out of the current number of requests received amounts to 194,872.

For the settlement of the Forced Labour Indemnification Fund alone, the ITS treated 950,000 inquiries within two years.

The ITS is currently undergoing a phase of re-organization. This means, for instance, that the time frame for processing new-received requests for confirmation (of employment, incarceration, insurance, stay) is maximally eight weeks. The reduction of the backlog is expected to be mostly completed until the end of the year 2007.

Mode of processing: In addition to the processing according to mandate, i.e. the labour-intensive processing of individual requests including the examination of the original documents (complete processing), there is a standard list processing of collective inquir-

ies (partial processing), for a successful realization of which a co-operation with third offices as authorities, associations, foundations etc. is prerequisite.

The processing according to mandate is mostly realized in the workflow meanwhile.

Owing to the imaging of the documents (at present, ca. 62 % of the old documentary stock are scanned), the number of the documents electronically checkable now without considerable time expenditure has further increased, which has had a positive effect on the figures of the mandatory replies.

Present-day problems: Thanks to these measures, it has proved possible last year to reduce the work backlog drastically, with the priority guidelines, e.g. the preferential treatment of requests submitted by persons aged over 80 in mind. It is important now to hold the excellent results in quality and quantity of 2006 in the evaluation field, despite the diminished number of staff, without neglecting the endeavours within the scope of document acquisition.

As far as the mandate of preservation is concerned, it is essential to maintain the documents for future generations. That's why the ITS started the systematic conservation and restoration of stocks at risk on the basis of a damage register in 2003. With the help of a service provider, ca. 1.46 million individual and list documents of the concentration camp documentation have been treated up to now. The focus of the therapy is on paper de-acidification, the removal of full-page laminations as well as the repair of mechanical damage.

For the year 2007, there are plans to subject further individual and list documents from this documentary stock to restoration and conservation. The budget covers the financial means needed for this. The work will be carried out by experts under the active support of ITS-employees predominantly in Bad Arolsen.

The imaging of the non-personal records from the General Documents Section was continued so to make this information electronically available for internal and external search processes.

Personnel: 2007 (as of 01.01.): 332 employees (including substitute personnel for employees on parental leave).

Opening to historical research: According to the agreements pertaining to International Law concluded in 1955, the documents preserved in Bad Arolsen are subject to the power of disposition of the International Commission. The governments represented in this Commission presently elaborate the rules required for the opening of the personal records.

Financing: The present budget amounts to approximately € 14 million and is covered 100 % from the budget of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.