

Status: July 2009

## The International Tracing Service (ITS)

### Mission Statement

*“The International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen serves victims of Nazi persecutions and their families by documenting their fate through the archives it manages. ITS preserves these historic records and makes them available for research.”*

### Field of Activities at ITS

The International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen is one of the world's largest Nazi archives. It documents the fate of millions of civilian victims of the National Socialist regime. The documents archived by ITS include original records from concentration camps, details of forced labour, and files on displaced persons. Due to its sheer volume and historical relevance, the service's holdings are unrivalled. ITS stores the original documents and clarifies the fate of those persecuted by the Nazis. Since November 2007, the archive has been accessible to researchers.

### Archive – Conservation of Historical Documents

ITS's total inventory comprises 26,000 linear metres of original documents from the Nazi era and post-war period. The Central Name Index represents the key to these documents. With 50 million references on the fate of over 17.5 million people, it is based on an alphabetic-phonetic filing system that was developed especially for ITS. The inventory is split up into the Central Name Index, prisoners, slave labourers, displaced persons, the children's search archive, general documents and correspondence files.

In order to preserve these historically valuable documents for future generations, they are being restored and conserved. These efforts are focussed on the deacidification of paper, removal of lamination and repair of any damages. The entire archive will simultaneously be digitalised by the end of 2011 within the scope of a major digitalisation project that is currently underway.

Access to the documents is explained in the user regulations, which serve the protection of personal data. Victims of the Nazi regime and their next of kin are granted free access to all documents concerning them. After signing a user's statement, researchers may also review any documents with the exception of correspondence that is less than 25 years old. A reading room is available at our location, where the files can be studied.

### Humanitarian Requests – Clarification of Fates

Even though more than 60 years have elapsed after the end of World War II, numerous requests continue to reach ITS from victims of the Nazi regime and their next of kin. An increasing number of second and third generation requests are being submitted for the clarification of specific fates of family members. Most of these requests concern information re-

garding imprisonment, but some of them also involve forced labour. For many years, ITS also issued letters of confirmation for the purpose of pension payments and indemnification.

In some cases, people are still looking for their family members today. In the area of tracing requests, the trend is increasingly moving away from wartime incidents towards the clarification of individual fates, as fewer and fewer people are found alive nowadays. Despite this, personal contact can sometimes still be established, often to half brothers and sisters.

Incoming humanitarian requests are processed within eight weeks with the exception of tracing requests, as ITS often has to conduct complex investigations here and is dependent upon information from third parties at home and abroad.

### **Historical Research – A Valuable Source for Scholars**

The documents at ITS provide deep insights into the monstrous dimension of the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. Since the ITS archive opened to the public in November 2007, scholars from research institutions, memorials, universities and museums have been able to examine the files stored here. The opening marks the start of a gradual transition from a tracing service to a significant archive for historical research.

This transformation will take a few years. The International Tracing Service's activity has revolved around the clarification of individual fates up until now. Historians, on the other hand, enquire about incidents, locations, population groups and correlations. To make the documents more accessible for research purposes, ITS has started working on a much more comprehensive indexing. Over time, an online catalogue and other search tools will be created. An academic library is also currently being instituted.

### **Legal Basis of ITS**

The International Tracing Service is governed by an International Commission comprised of eleven member states (Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, USA) under the Bonn Agreements of 1955 and the amendment protocol from 2006. It is managed on behalf of the International Commission by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The institution is financed through the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. The ITS budget amounts to 14 million euros per annum.

### **ITS History**

As early as 1943, the British Red Cross was asked by the Headquarters of the Allied Forces to set up a tracing service for missing persons. As the war progressed, the office was moved from London to Versailles, and later to Frankfurt am Main.

In January 1946, the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) in Arolsen took over the task of accommodating and repatriating millions of non-German fugitives. Arolsen was located roughly in the centre of all four occupation zones back then, and also had an intact infrastructure. On 1 July 1947, the IRO (International Refugee Organization) was handed over the mandate. The name of the bureau was changed to "International Tracing Service" on 1 January 1948 and is still called so today. Since 1955, ITS has been run by the ICRC.

Now that the archive has opened up for research and humanitarian activities are gradually declining, the question of the future structure and funding of the International Tracing Service is being raised. The International Commission opened the debate on the future of the institution in May 2008. The first interim report is expected in May 2009.

### **Facts and Figures**

Number of employees: approx. 310

Archive statistics:

50 million references with information on  
17.5 million people  
25,908 metres of material in stock  
232,710 metres of microfilm  
106,870 microfiches

Since its inception in 1943, the archive has responded to 11.8 million requests for information and compiled more than 3 million information files.

Today around 900 requests reach ITS each month, 50 percent of which are filed online at its website. In 2008, requests had come from 76 countries. Most requests are from Germany, the US, Israel and Eastern Europe. The backlog of requests from past years was cleared in 2008.

The results for 2008:

10,251 incoming requests from 76 different countries  
8144 responses given  
1346 visitors

The results for the first half of 2009:

6.124 incoming requests from 66 different countries  
5690 responses given  
981 visitors

## **Contact**

International Tracing Service (ITS)  
Große Allee 5-9  
34454 Bad Arolsen  
Germany

telephone: +49 (0) 5691 629 - 159

fax: +49 (0 )5691 629 - 501

email@its-arolsen.org

www.its-arolsen.org

Office hours:

Monday to Thursday: 8 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Friday: 8 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Guided tours:

Every first Wednesday of the month at 2:00 in German; every first Tuesday of the month at 2:00 in English. Registration required.