

Status: June 2017

The International Tracing Service (ITS)

The International Tracing Service (ITS) is an archive and a center for documenting National Socialist persecution and the liberated survivors. Former victims of Nazism and their families receive information regarding their incarceration, forced labor, and postwar Allied assistance. The archives provide the foundation for ITS research and education, which are enhanced through collaboration with other international memorials, archives and research institutions.

The ITS commemorates and memorializes the victims of the Nazi crimes. As of 2013 the original documents in the ITS archives are included on the UNESCO "Memory of the World" Registry.

The ITS counts among its principal tasks:

- to clarify the fate of persons persecuted under the Nazi rule and to search for family members,
- to supply information to survivors and family members of Nazi victims,
- to carry out research and education and to support commemoration,
- as well as to preserve and conserve the documents and to make them accessible.

Preservation and Accessibility of the Historical Documents

The structure of the archives is divided into three person-related topical fields, i.e. incarceration, forced labour and Displaced Persons. These documents are completed by records created in the context of the tracing work, such as the Central Name Index, the archives of the Child Search Branch and the correspondence with survivors, family members of the victims and other institutions. The Central Name Index is an important key to the documents which is based on an alphabetic-phonetic filing system specifically developed for the ITS and includes 50 million reference cards on the fate of 17.5 million people.

In order to preserve the historically valuable documents for future generations, they are being restored and conserved. The respective efforts focus on de-acidifying the documents' paper, removing lamination and repairing any damages. In parallel, the documents are made accessible to the public by means of digitization, the provision of a database and a complete description of the holdings aiming to facilitate research. Since 2015 the ITS has also been developing its Online Archive, where specially chosen collections can be viewed by researchers and other interested persons worldwide (<https://digitalcollections.its-arolsen.org>).

Information and Clarification of Fates

More than 70 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, and thousands of requests continue to reach the ITS from victims of the Nazi regime and their next-of-kin. The ITS provides information on the persecution with the help of the documentation in the archives. The ITS also assists people with their search for family members from whom they were separated as a consequence either of persecution, deportation or emigration. The

number of requests for detailed information from the second and third generations has steadily increased. The ITS also issues letters of confirmation for the purpose of pension payments and indemnification. Survivors and family members of victims are provided with a report and copies of the individual original documents and lists kept in Bad Arolsen, free of charge.

The ITS will continue this humanitarian work as long as there is a need for it. Every person has the right to know his or her origin and to find out about the fate suffered by family members.

Research and Education

The documents at the ITS provide deep insights into the dimension of the National Socialists' crimes. Research and educational activities at the ITS strive to promote scholarly analysis and examination of this era's crimes, thus keeping the memory alive. The institution itself accompanies research schemes, initiates collaboration with other institutions and develops its own projects.

Since the opening of the archives in November 2007, the digital documents have been freely accessible to research. Scholars from universities, memorial centres, museums and educational institutions as well as regional historians pursue their research in the ITS archives. A database, a scholarly library and reading rooms are available for use at the ITS in Bad Arolsen. Access to the archives is governed by the regulations for access.

The institution has an educational concept for cooperation with schools, universities and other educational facilities. The concept provides for projects, seminars and workshops for educators to be held and teaching material to be developed for the different grades in schools and for extra-curricular advanced training. The ITS has made it its mission to convey the significance of the collections kept in its archives to the general public and to succeeding generations, thus preserving the memory of the many victims of murder and persecution.

Legal Basis of the ITS

The International Tracing Service is governed by an eleven-nation International Commission (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America). The Commission also appoints the director. The ITS is legally based on the Berlin agreements which came into force in January 2013 and replaced the Bonn agreements from 1955. The German Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*) is the institutional partner of the ITS. The ITS is financed by the German Federal Government Commission for Culture and Media (BKM) with approx. 14 million euros annually.

ITS History

In January 1946, the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) moved the Central Tracing Office to Arolsen. On July 1, 1947, the mandate was handed over to the IRO (International Refugee Organization). The name of the bureau was changed to "International Tracing Service" on January 1, 1948, the official name by which the service is still called today. While the Allies had monitored the work of the ITS in the first few years, this mandate was taken on by an International Commission in 1955. On behalf of the Commission, the ITS was managed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) until December 2012.

In 2013 Prof. Dr. Rebecca Boehling, a US American historian, was the first Director appointed by the International Commission. As of January 2016 the director is Floriane Hohenberg, a French native. The human rights expert with experience in managing international organizations was recruited in 2015 by the International Commission.

Facts and Figures

Number of employees: 255

Director: Floriane Hohenberg

Archives' statistics:

50 million references with information on

17.5 million persons

25,908 metres of material in stock

232,710 metres of microfilm

106,870 microfiches (in DIN A6 format)

Since its inception the archival institution has responded to 11.8 million requests for information and opened more than 3 million correspondence files with information on victims of NS-persecution.

Today about 1,000 requests reach the ITS every month and from around 70 countries. Most requests are from Germany, Eastern Europe, and the USA.

Contact

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Office hours:

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

Friday: 8 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Visitors to the ITS are invited to a presentation which offers an introduction into the tasks and history of the institution, the archival collections, and individual fates. For organizational reasons, please give notice of your visit in advance.