



Power of humanity

**Council of Delegates of the International
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

7 December 2015, Geneva



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CD/15/10

Original: French

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Geneva, Switzerland
7 December 2015

Preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Follow-up to Resolution 6 of the Council of Delegates 2011

Background report

**Document prepared by
the International Committee of the Red Cross,
the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the
International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum**

Geneva, October 2015

BACKGROUND REPORT

PRESERVING THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

SUMMARY

In pursuance of the resolution on Preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (resolution 6) adopted by the Council of Delegates in 2011, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum sent out a letter (dated 18 July 2013) to all National Societies asking them about their practices and experiences in this regard. Around forty of them provided information and suggestions for next steps to implement the resolution. The consultation organizers drafted a report summarizing the responses and recommendations received, which was then submitted to the contributing National Societies. This report sets forth the findings of the consultation and suggestions on how to facilitate exchanges within the Movement, with a view to improving the preservation and promotion of its rich historical heritage.

The following 39 National Societies responded to the letter of 18 July 2013 and completed the questionnaire: Germany, Andorra, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Burundi, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Republic of Korea, Denmark, El Salvador, Egypt, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, India, Japan, Jordan, Lesotho, Morocco, Monaco, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Seychelles, Switzerland, Swaziland, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, United Kingdom and Uruguay (as at July 2014).

Archive services, organization and cooperation

Almost all the National Societies have documents relating to their foundation. Generally, they conserve paper archives, photographs and films.

Eighteen of the National Societies that answered the questionnaire have an archive service. The others generally devote resources to archiving functions as part of a wider management structure (usually a central secretariat or communications department).

The National Societies of Germany, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland and Montenegro have commissioned a specialized company or the national archives to manage a large part of their archives. Other National Societies that have an ongoing cooperation arrangement with their national archives or a specialized academic institution (Australia, Republic of Korea, Estonia, France, Norway, Thailand, United Kingdom, Serbia and Switzerland).

Inventories, conservation and digitization

Half the National Societies that have their own specific archive service keep an inventory of their archives and carry out conservation work to preserve (and sometimes restore) their historical collections on a regular basis. Ten National Societies have their collections partially or mostly digitized, and five National Societies said that they intended to digitize theirs in the near future. A lack of resources is the main reason given by National Societies for not digitizing their archives.

Public access, exhibitions and museums

Twenty-six National Societies reported that their archives were available to the general public for research purposes. Only a few receive visitors regularly, and others grant access to their archives on request. Access is sometimes limited to consultation of the records of decision-making bodies or restricted in order to protect personal information. Six National Societies said that their archives were not available to the public.

Two National Societies run a museum that is open to the general public (the German Red Cross reported that it did not have a museum at its headquarters, but fifteen regionally managed museums in different parts of the country). In addition, seven National Societies said that they had historical documents on show as part of a permanent exhibition at their headquarters (display cases).

The ICRC and the Secretariat of the International Federation each have their own archive service. They store and conserve records relating to their foundation and history. There are also many documents concerning the history and development of National Societies. There are regulations in place providing for their consultation by the public.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (the Museum) is, by its very nature, a public museum. Its aim is to maintain and extend its collections, preserving them with due care and in adequate spaces in accordance with the standards developed by the International Council of Museums. It has records and objects from all the National Societies, and particularly from the twelve Societies with which it has established a partnership.

In its permanent exhibition, the Museum displays exhibits from its own collection, in addition to items provided by the International Federation and the ICRC. An interactive chronology, which is open to the public, commemorates the anniversaries of the National Societies, which form part of a list of milestones in the history of the Movement.

Support required and next steps

Several National Societies wishing to develop archive services for their organization or for external use identified the following priority needs:

- technical support to preserve their collections;
- exchanges and technical guidance on digitization;
- guidance on communication and promoting archives (internal and external);
- support to set up and prepare exhibitions or establish Red Cross/Red Crescent museums.

Several National Societies (in particular, the Societies of Germany, the Republic of Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom) are willing to provide support in the following areas:

- technical guidance on archive management and preservation;
- digitizing audiovisual material;
- preservation and disaster prevention.

Various National Societies made the following suggestions for next steps to implement the resolution:

- establish an e-forum to discuss needs and priorities in greater detail in cooperation with the Movement;
- draw up a list of all the Red Cross/Red Crescent museums in the Movement, including directories and details, with a view to promoting historical heritage and organizing exhibitions;
- encourage all National Societies to take advantage of the celebration of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day on 8th May each year to promote their archive material and historical heritage;
- ensure that support is available to National Societies from the International Federation, the ICRC and sister National Societies to create archive services, covering establishment, conservation techniques and space management;

- organize a meeting of archive experts or a workshop for exchanges within the Movement on archive management and the promotion of historical heritage, establishing the digitization of archival material as a priority;
- establish a centralized and standardized repository of Red Cross/Red Crescent history (hosted on the websites of the International Federation and the ICRC) – to be formed, for example, at the International Conference on the History of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to be held by Flinders University in Adelaide (Australia) on 9-11 September 2016.

The International Federation Secretariat and the ICRC are set to pursue these suggestions and are able, as of now, to take the following steps:

- update the archives webpage to provide information online and training material on archiving methodology and best practices;
- support training for National Society personnel wishing to gain experience and skills in these areas, provided through delegation staff in the field (who will call on the expertise of their colleagues in Geneva, if necessary) or at an event in Geneva, as appropriate;
- facilitate contact between National Societies, particularly peer-to-peer technical support, with the posting of contact details on *FedNet*;
- organize targeted missions from Geneva or draw on the expertise of regional delegations to advise and train National Society personnel involved in archiving work.

As proposed by the National Societies, the Museum is prepared to act as a reference and liaison point for the network of Red Cross/Red Crescent museums.

The Museum is open to the possibility of professional exchanges (workshops, internships, etc.) and can, as of now, make its expertise available to National Societies wishing to preserve their collections or establish or update their own museum, either providing specific advice or making *ad hoc* visits to National Societies that are setting up or updating their exhibitions.

As a first step, the Museum intends to draw up a list of all museums and permanent exhibitions run by National Societies, based on the information that they themselves have supplied.