

Archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the Federation) works on the basis of the Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to inspire, facilitate and promote all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. The Federation's Archives and records management programme were established in 1996.

Introduction

Founded in 1919, the Federation directs and co-ordinates international assistance of the Movement to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and in health emergencies. It acts as the official representative of its member Societies in the international field. It promotes co-operation between National Societies, and works to strengthen their capacity to carry out effective disaster preparedness, health and social programmes. The Federation carries out relief operations to assist victims of disasters, and combines this with development work to strengthen the capacities of its member National Societies. The Federation's work focuses on four core areas: promoting humanitarian values, disaster response, disaster preparedness, and health and community care.

In May 1919, five national Red Cross Societies formed the League of Red Cross Societies, with a Secretariat located in Geneva, Switzerland. By the time of the first League meeting in 1920, membership in the League had increased to 31 National Societies. The Articles of Association adopted in 1919 gave the League the following mandate: "To encourage and promote in every country in the world the establishment and development of a duly authorised voluntary national Red Cross organisation, having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease, and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world, and to secure the co-operation of such organisations for these purposes;

To promote the welfare of mankind by furnishing a medium for bringing within the reach of all the peoples the benefits to be derived from present known facts and new contributions to science and medical knowledge and their application;

To furnish a medium for co-ordinating relief work in case of great national or international calamities.” The Secretariat of the League moved to Paris, France, in 1922, but in 1939 the Secretariat returned to Geneva, where it has remained to this day. In 1983 the League changed its name to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and in 1991 changed its name again, to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Federation now consists of member National Societies from 186 countries.

The Federation’s Archives and records management programme were established in 1996, and both are managed by the archivist. In addition, as manager of the Library and Archives Unit, the archivist manages the library (1.5 staff), the storage and distribution/ sale of Federation publications and souvenirs (1 staff), and the headquarters mail room (1 staff). When the archivist is absent, the Archives is closed to the public, and the librarian responds to internal requests for archival records and closed files in storage.

Records management programme

The archivist is responsible for developing and maintaining a common records classification system and records retention and disposal schedules for all Secretariat records, for training Secretariat staff on filing procedures, and for the storage of closed headquarters files in Geneva.

The records classifications and retention and disposal schedules are issued as filing procedures to the Secretariat’s headquarters departments in Geneva and to its field offices around the world (70 offices on average), and apply to records in any format (paper, electronic, audio-visual etc.). These procedures also apply to the records of the Federation’s statutory bodies (e.g. General Assembly, Governing Board, etc.) held by the Secretariat.

The records classifications system categorises records by the functions, processes and activities that the records document, and not by organisational structure. When an activity is transferred from one department to another, the records classification system is modified to indicate the change of responsibility for the files, but the records classification itself rarely needs modification. When several departments or field offices perform the same activity they use the same records classification for the files that document the activity.

The archivist develops records classifications and retention and disposal schedules in conjunction with the manager(s) and staff of the department(s) responsible for the records. The archivist appraises records while developing retention and disposal schedules, and the disposal instructions indicate whether a category of records is to be transferred to the Archives or destroyed. A records retention and disposal schedule is approved by: the Director of the division in which the department responsible for the records is situated; the Head of the Department responsible for the records; the archivist. Records retention and disposal schedules are also approved by the Head, Legal Department, when there are specific legal requirements for retaining records.

Headquarters department managers and field office managers are responsible for filing current records, applying the records retention and disposal schedules, and destroying records or transferring records to the Archives. Field office managers are in addition responsible for storing closed field office files.

Archives

The Archives holds 600 linear metres of records documenting the activities of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Secretariat and statutory bodies. The principle topics of the Federation's archival records are: governance of the Federation; relations between the Secretariat and member National Societies; disaster relief operations; refugee relief operations; health, especially nursing education, blood donation/transfusion, and community health; Junior Red Cross (children); the Centenary of the Red Cross; the Red Cross, Red Crescent and peace.

Although the Archives is not a repository for the records of member National Societies, the Archives does hold reports and publications created by National Societies and sent to the Secretariat in the course of regular business.

Most of the archival records have not yet been arranged, and are described in a simple database that indicates only the file title, date and location. Descriptions of records that have been fully arranged and described follow the Canadian Rules for Archival Description (RAD) and are stored in a database created in-house by the Secretariat's computer department.

The Federation's audio-visual archives (photographs, films, videos, posters) are on permanent loan to the Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge in Geneva. The audiovisual archives include many films, videos and posters produced by member National Societies, copies of which were sent to the Secretariat's communications department.

Research usage of the Federation's Archives is split roughly 50/50 between the Federation (Secretariat staff and member National Societies) and the general public. The Archives are open to the public by appointment with the archivist. The following records are open to the public:

- a) Federation publications that the Secretariat makes available for sale to the public or distributes to the public for free;
- b) decisions of the General Assembly, and policies or reports adopted through a decision, except for those decisions, policies and reports designated confidential by the General Assembly;
- c) decisions of the Governing Board, and policies or reports adopted through a decision, except for those decisions, policies and reports designated confidential by the Governing Board;
- d) minutes and reports of statutory bodies more than 20 years old;
- e) non-confidential files of the Secretariat that are more than 30 years old.

The period after which a record becomes public is calculated from the date on which the record is closed. Records classified confidential, which are generally records containing personal data of employees or beneficiaries, are closed to the public.

National Societies' Archives

Each member National Society is responsible for its own records. The Federation Secretariat's records classification system and retention and disposal schedules do not apply to National Societies, although a National Society may download the Secretariat's records classification system and retention and disposal schedules from the Federation's intranet if it wishes to adapt them for its own use. The Federation Archives does not acquire records of National Societies.

Some National Societies, such as the British Red Cross, the French Red Cross, and the Turkish Red Crescent, have established Archives. The Federation archivist and National Societies' archivists co-operate when researchers' topics cover both Federation and National Society activities. When a researcher contacts the wrong organisation, for example contacting the Federation Archives when the research topic is solely concerned with activities of the British Red Cross, the Federation archivist directs the researcher to the National Society Archives (and vice versa).

Many National Societies have no formal Archives. The Federation archivist will, when requested by a National Society, provide advice on how to establish and manage an Archives and/or a records management programme. Several years ago the Federation archivist led a series of workshops for anglophone National Societies in Africa to jointly develop a records management procedures manual for these National Societies.



Grant Mitchell

Manager, Library and Archives Unit. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Abstract

Deutsch

Die Internationale Rotkreuz- und Roter Halbmond-Bewegung hat zum Ziel, den internationalen Beistand für Opfer natürlicher sowie menschlicher Katastrophen und für Flüchtlinge zu koordinieren. 1919 wurde sie gegründet und hat heute Mitglieder aus 186 Ländern. 1996 wurden das Archiv und das Records-Management-Programm eingerichtet. Der Archivar ist sowohl für das Records Management als auch für das Archiv verantwortlich, schult die Mitarbeitenden in der Aktenablage und verwaltet das Klassifizierungssystem. Mit diesem System werden die Unterlagen anhand ihrer Funktion und ihres Prozesses und nicht anhand der Organisationsstruktur abgelegt. Die Archivbestände belaufen sich insgesamt auf ca. 600 lm. Die audiovisuellen Bestände befinden sich im *Musée international de la croix-Rouge et du croissant-Rouge* in Dauerausleihe. Um die Archive konsultieren zu können, muss mit dem Archivar ein Termin vereinbart werden. Archivrecherchen werden zur Hälfte von Mitarbeitenden der Bewegung und zur anderen Hälfte von Privatpersonen in Anspruch genommen. Wichtig ist es auch, zu wissen, dass die Internationale Bewegung keine Unterlagen der nationalen Bewegungen archiviert, dafür sind diese selber verantwortlich. Bis jetzt haben bereits das Britische und das Französische Rote Kreuz sowie der Türkische Halbmond solche Archive aufgebaut.

Français

La Croix-Rouge internationale et le Croissant-Rouge ont pour objectif la défense et le soutien de la communauté internationale aux victimes de catastrophes naturelles et humaines. Ils coordonnent également l'aide aux réfugiés. Fondée en 1919, l'institution compte aujourd'hui 186 pays membres. En 1996, elle a créé ses propres archives et un programme de management. L'archiviste titulaire est responsable du système d'archivage et assume la formation des collaborateurs pour la gestion des dossiers. Il a aussi la responsabilité du système de classification. Grâce à ce système, les documents de l'organisation sont mis en valeur selon leur fonction et leur processus, et non selon la structure de l'organisation. Les fonds archivés se montent à environ 600 mètres linéaires. Les fonds audiovisuels sont déposés en prêt de longue durée au *Musée international de la croix-Rouge et du croissant-Rouge*. Pour pouvoir consulter les archives, il est nécessaire de prendre rendez-vous avec l'archiviste. Les recherches dans les archives sont effectuées pour une moitié par les collaborateurs de l'institution et pour l'autre moitié par des personnes privées. Il est aussi important de savoir que le mouvement international n'archive pas les documents des mouvements nationaux, qui ont leurs propres archives. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui, seules les Croix-Rouge anglaise, française et le Croissant-Rouge turc ont constitué de telles archives nationales.