

# Rules governing access to the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Adopted by the ICRC Assembly on 17 January 1996 and amended by the ICRC Assembly on 29 April 2004 and 19 September 2013

## Introduction

- a. For the purposes of these Rules, the ICRC archives comprise the following types of records:
  - documents submitted to or produced by the ICRC's decision-making bodies;
  - documents produced by Committee members and documents that they have received from others in the course of their work;
  - documents produced or received by headquarters units and delegations in the course of their work;
  - documents received from other sources that concern any aspect of the ICRC's work and that are deposited in the ICRC's archives.
- b. "Records" refer to
  - all documents mentioned in point (a) above, whether in paper, microform or electronic format;
  - all audio, audiovisual and photographic material produced or received by the ICRC in the course of its work.
- c. These Rules apply to records deposited at ICRC headquarters and, mutatis mutandis, to current, semi-current and historical records that are not deposited in the organization's archives at headquarters.

## Section I: General provisions

### Article 1 • Users

Under these Rules, two categories of users have access to the ICRC archives:

- members of the Committee and ICRC staff; and
- the general public.

### Article 2 • Limitations

The access rights to the ICRC archives of these two categories of users are subject to the limitations set out in Sections II and III.

### Article 3 • Usage

The ICRC archivist specifies the practical terms for consulting the ICRC archives in the Regulations for users of the ICRC archives.

## Section II: **Committee members and ICRC staff**

### Article 4 • Members

- a. Committee members may consult the ICRC's current, semi-current and historical records. They do not have general access to the personnel files of ICRC staff.
- b. The access rights of the Control Commission are set out in the ICRC's Internal Regulations.

### Article 5 • Staff

- a. In the course of their work, permanent ICRC staff have access to current, semi-current and historical records that are classified "public," "internal handling" or "exceptional handling – confidential."
- b. ICRC staff may consult records classified as "exceptional handling – strictly confidential" only with the approval of the unit that produced the document or, where this is not possible, the approval of the ICRC's archivist. The minutes of closed-door meetings of decision-making bodies may be consulted only with the express authorization of the ICRC president.
- c. Access by the Internal Audit is governed by the provisions of the ICRC's Internal Regulations.
- d. When responding to requests for assistance from ICRC employees, the ombudsman shall have access to documents that concern them and that are classified as "exceptional handling – strictly confidential."

## Section III: **Public**

### Article 6 • Public archives

- a. The Committee decides which records will be open to the public on the basis of an outline of the archived material presented to it by the ICRC's archivist.
- b. The ICRC's public archives comprise three types of records, to which access is provided after one of several defined closure periods. These periods take into account the nature of the data and the need to ensure that access will in no way be detrimental to the ICRC, to the victims that the organization is responsible for protecting, or to any other private or public interests requiring protection. The three types are as follows:
  - general ICRC files dating back more than 40 years, including the minutes of meetings of decision-making bodies, which the ICRC has decided to release in chronological batches (each batch generally covering around 10 years);
  - minutes of meetings of the Selection Committee and serial files containing personal or medical information dating back more than 60 years;
  - card files, lists, individual files and general documents from the ICRC Tracing Agency (now called the Central Tracing Agency) dating back more than 60 years.
- c. Access to biographical or autobiographical information (excluding personal data from the Tracing Agency) on a specific individual is allowed after 40 years. Such searches must be carried out by the ICRC archivist. If permission is obtained from the individual concerned, the period may be shortened.

- d. Access to material deposited in the ICRC archives by individuals or outside organizations is authorized on the date set by those individuals or organizations. If no such date has been set by the above-mentioned, the material is made available in accordance with the ICRC's terms of access.
- e. The closure period begins on the date the file is closed.
- f. Documents that were open to the general public before being deposited in the ICRC archives remain so thereafter.

#### Article 7 • Audiovisual records

Photographic, audiovisual and audio records are made available to the public if:

- these documents were produced for purposes of communication; or
  - they relate to events dating back more than 40 years; or
  - they do not undermine the dignity of the people concerned or jeopardize the ICRC's work.
- In such cases, the documents are protected for 60 years beginning on the date on which the photograph or footage or recording was made.

#### Article 8 • Special access

- a. Upon approval by the director in charge of the archives, the president may, before expiry of the closure periods laid down in Articles 6 and 7, grant special access to facilitate academic work which the ICRC wishes to see successfully completed or which it feels is in its interest. The president shall inform the Assembly of such decisions.
- b. The Rules governing special access to the ICRC's classified archives, adopted by the Assembly, set out the procedure to be followed for Article 8(a) above.

#### Article 9 • Restrictions

Public access to the ICRC archives may be temporarily delayed in order to permit necessary conservation work on the documents requested, or if no space is available in the reading room.

#### Article 10 • Fees

A fee may be charged for searches carried out by ICRC staff at the request of people outside the organization.

#### Article 11 • Commercial use

No commercial use may be made of the records without the express agreement of the ICRC.

### Section IV: **Modifications**

#### Article 12 • Entry into force

These Rules replace the Rules governing access to the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross of 1 May 2004. They take effect on 19 September 2013.