

## **ICRC Assembly members visit Germany**

The ICRC Assembly members were in Germany from 30 September to 2 October 1992 to visit the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Arolsen and two sections of the German Red Cross, in Thüringen and Berlin respectively. This was the first time that the Assembly had travelled abroad, apart from a visit to Solferino.

On 30 September Mr. Charles Biedermann, the Director of the ITS, gave the members of the Assembly an overview of the Service's work, showing how important and relevant it still is today.

The International Tracing Service was set up in London in 1943. It is responsible for collecting, classifying and preserving all documents relating to German and other nationals who were persecuted and interned in Nazi concentration camps or labour camps during the Second World War, or to non-Germans displaced as a result of the fighting. This material is processed and made available to the individuals directly concerned.

The ITS employs some 400 people and receives several thousand requests each month. In 1955 its administration was taken over by the ICRC, in its capacity as a humanitarian, neutral and impartial organization.

During their visit to the ITS the members of the ICRC met Botho Prince of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein, President of the German Red Cross, and representatives of the local authorities, the Foreign Ministry and the Swiss Embassy in Germany.

The members of the Assembly went to Erfurt on 1 October to visit the Thüringen *Landesverband* (section) of the German Red Cross. After being welcomed by its President, Mr. H. Schlegelberger, they toured a treatment centre for torture victims, a home for adolescent asylum-seekers and a reception centre for refugees. ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga, accompanied by Assembly members, Mrs. Anne Petitpierre, Miss Francesca Pometta and Mr. Marco Mumenthaler, was received by the *Regierender Bürgermeister* (Mayor) of Berlin and later held a press conference.

Throughout their very full programme of visits the members of the Assembly were impressed by the wide range of activities that the German Red Cross conducts and by the commitment of its staff, both professionals and volunteers. They gained an insight into the problems experienced by the National Society as a result of recent political upheavals and the constant influx of asylum-seekers. The visit to Arolsen demonstrated once again the importance that the ICRC attaches to the ITS.