
The International Committee of the Red Cross reduces the protective embargo on access to its archives

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On 29 April 2004, the ICRC Assembly decided to modify the Rules governing access to the archives of the ICRC of 1996 by shortening the protective embargo on access to its archives to a general period of 40 years and an extended period of 60 years. It is therefore now opening its 1951-1965 archives to consultation by the general public.

In reducing the embargo period, the ICRC is seeking to comply with current trends regarding public access to archives and is at the same time confirming its policy of openness and transparency as defined in 1996. It is also reasserting its wish to make the history of the ICRC known, in full keeping with the research mandate entrusted to Jean-Claude Favez in 1979 and the publication in 1988 of *The Red Cross and the Holocaust* and numerous other historical works written since 1996 using ICRC archives.

An extra 500 linear meters of archives are thus being opened to the public for the first time. They cover the conflicts of the early years of the Cold War and the decolonization period, for instance: the Korean War (1950-1953), the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the Suez Conflict (1956), the Hungarian Revolution (1956), the Algerian War (1954-1962), the Independence of Congo (1960-1965), the Cuban Crisis (1962) and the civil war in Yemen (1962-1964). They can also be used for research on legal or general topics, for example the implementation of the Conventions of 1949, the revision of the statutes of the International Red Cross and the agreement with the League (1951-1952), and the International Conferences of Toronto (1952), New Delhi (1957) and Vienna (1965).

Annex: Rules governing access to the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross

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

(Adopted by the ICRC Assembly on 17 January 1996
and revised by the ICRC Assembly on 29 April 2004)

Introduction — *Purpose*

1. The present Rules govern access to the ICRC archives, which comprise:
 - the archives of the ICRC decision-making bodies;
 - the archives of Committee members;
 - the archives of the units at headquarters;
 - the archives of delegations;
 - archival material from other sources which are kept at the ICRC.
2. The Rules also apply, by analogy, to current records, semi-current records and closed records, which are not stored in the ICRC archives.

Section I: General Provisions

Article 1 — *Principle*

The present Rules lay down conditions for access to the ICRC archives by two categories of users:

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

Article 2 — *Limitations*

The various limitations on access to the ICRC archives by each of these categories are set out in Sections II and III.

Article 3 — *Access*

The ICRC archivist sets out the practical terms and conditions for access to the ICRC archives in the Regulations for users of ICRC archives.

Section II: Committee members and ICRC staff

Article 4 — *Members*

1. In accordance with Articles 2, 3 and 17 of the *Règlement intérieur du CICR* of 24 June 1998, Committee members have access to the ICRC current, semi-current and closed records, whatever the classification of those documents. They do not have general access to the personal files of ICRC staff.
2. The right of access by the Control Commission is reserved in accordance with the regulations governing its activities, as approved by the ICRC Assembly.

Article 5 — *Staff*

1. In pursuance of their professional duties, permanent ICRC staff have access to the current, semi-current and closed records that are classified “internal” or “confidential” and are protected during a set period.
2. Only the unit that has created the document or, where this is not possible, the ICRC archivist, may authorize access by ICRC staff to archives classified as “strictly confidential”. The minutes of meetings held *in camera* by the decision-making bodies may be consulted only with the express authorization of the ICRC President.
3. The right of access by the Head of Internal Audit is reserved in accordance with the terms of reference pertaining to that function, which have been adopted by the ICRC Assembly.

Section III: Public

Article 6 — *Public archives*

The general public has access to archives classified as “public”¹ after a set period of time, to ensure that such access will in no way be detrimental to the ICRC, to the victims that it is its duty to protect, or to any other private or public interests requiring protection.

¹ The ICRC archivists describe and arrange archives classified as “public”.

Article 7 — *Public archives*

1. Three types of documents are to be found in the “public” archives:
 - General ICRC files dating back more than 40 years, including minutes of the decision-making bodies.
 - The minutes of the Recruitment Commission, the personal files of staff members and the record series containing personal or medical information dating back more than 60 years.
 - Access to biographical or autobiographical information on a specific individual is allowed after 40 years; such research, however, must be carried out by an ICRC archivist (see Article 10).
 - If permission is obtained from the individual concerned, the 40-year period may be shortened.
 - Access to archival material from other sources, which has been stored in the ICRC archives, is authorized from the date set by the individuals or institutions that deposited the material at the ICRC.
2. The period after which a file becomes public is calculated from the date on which the file is closed.²
3. Documents that were open to consultation by the general public before being deposited in the ICRC archives remain so thereafter.

Article 8 — *Special access*

1. The Assembly Council may, before expiry of the time limits set in Article 7, grant special access to facilitate academic work which the ICRC itself wishes to see successfully completed or which it finds of interest.
2. The Assembly Council adopts the Rules governing special access to the ICRC classified archives.

Article 9 — *Restrictions*

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

Article 10 — *Fees*

A charge is made for research carried out by ICRC staff at the request of persons outside the organization (see Article 7).

² The Committee approves the table of public record groups kept up to date by the ICRC archivist.

Article 11 — Use

No use may be made of the archives for commercial purposes unless a specific contract to that effect has been concluded with the ICRC.

Section IV: Entry into force**Article 12 — Abrogation**

The present Rules replace, as of 1 May 2004, the *Rules governing access to the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross* of 17 January 1996.