

ICRC's library collection development policy

The aim of the ICRC's library collection development policy is to maintain the relevance and quality of its collection. This policy therefore sets out to:

- set guidelines for organizing, developing and conserving the collections
- bring acquisitions into line with the ICRC's future plans
- coordinate and harmonize acquisitions and collection management, and ensure that these are carried out efficiently.

1. Context

The ICRC's library was founded in 1863. Its **purpose** is to:

- raise the profile of the ICRC, its work, and the foundation of that work: international humanitarian law
- acquire, assemble, manage and make available any public material that may be of interest to the people it serves
- conserve an exhaustive collection of all public documents published at ICRC headquarters and the translations thereof. (All "published documents" means ones that enter a commercial distribution network, in this case that of the ICRC).

1.1 Objectives

The library positions itself as the first port of call for information on humanitarian law.

Within the organization, the library's **objectives** are to:

- enhance its collection by updating it regularly in line with the ICRC's evolving activities, and ensure that it is accessible
- anticipate ICRC staff needs in terms of documents for their research and discussions

- offer services such as inter-library loans, one-off searches of its collection, bibliographies, etc.

Outside the organization, the library's **objective** is to:

- provide, circulate and promote material that helps to raise the ICRC's profile, its work and the foundation of that work: international humanitarian law.

1.2 Target groups

The library's main user group is ICRC staff. These are mainly staff members based at headquarters, such as lawyers and those working in specialist fields.

ICRC delegates passing through headquarters also use the library before they leave for their field assignments. Staff in the field also call upon the library's services, above all to request journal articles.

The outside target group is mainly made up of students, but also historians, members of non-governmental organizations, people from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the general public.

1.3 Collections

The library has a total of 30,000 documents, divided into several collections – a unique heritage. These collections are also open to people outside the ICRC, which helps make better known the organization, its work and the foundation on which that work was built: humanitarian law.

The five collections are organized as follows:

- historical collection
- National Society collection
- ICRC collection
- State-practice collection
- current collection.

1.3.1. Historical collection

This collection is made up of works published during the period stretching from the creation of the Red Cross (1863) to the end of the First World War. It is extremely valuable both because of the range of the

works it contains and because it illustrates the ICRC's concerns during that period.¹ No new acquisitions are made for this collection, which is closed.

1.3.2. National Society collection

This collection is made up of documents published by the National Societies in around 80 countries.²

The collection has historical significance to the extent that each document reflects the activities, concerns and working methods of a given National Society at a given time. The library accepts for this collection documents donated to it, but it does not actively monitor new National Society publications for this purpose.

1.3.3. ICRC collection

This collection contains all the public ICRC documents – books, journals, leaflets, manuals, conference working documents, etc. – in all the languages in which they have been produced. As such it constitutes part of the ICRC's institutional memory and is recognized for its heritage value.

Each new publication is automatically added to the collection, regardless of its subject matter.

1.3.4. State-practice collection

This collection contains documents illustrating the State practice in terms of implementing international humanitarian law.

¹ The contents include:

- the minutes of the first Red Cross conferences,
- reports of Assembly meetings,
- the first ICRC publications,
- the works written by the ICRC's founders (such as first edition of *A Memory of Solferino*),
- many publications about military medicine and hygiene produced by philanthropic organizations,
- texts published by the first National Societies,
- the first international law treaties.

² The contents include:

- periodicals (journals for the general public, series of press releases, etc.),
- annual reports and reports covering several years,
- monographs (historical works, reports on specific events, etc.),
- first-aid manuals and medical handbooks.

It is a unique and recently established collection, brought together as it was by merging collections that had been held by various ICRC services. Those services are now responsible for providing documents to the library, which has no need to actively seek them.

The collection contains some 1,000 documents, in the following categories:

- national case law
- national legislation
- military handbooks
- national reports.

1.3.5. Current collection

The current collection includes books, articles and journals published since the end of the First World War.

Two-thirds of the current collection can be freely consulted in the library's public-access area. This includes works on the most important issues, reference works, and the most frequently consulted journals that are still in print. The rest of the collection is stored in roller racking systems.

The library also offers a range of electronic resources (such as bibliographic databases and electronic access to the full text of journal articles), in addition to its paper resources.

The topics covered by the current collection are determined by the acquisition policy *per se*. The acquisition policy sets out the criteria for selecting documents based on their content, how exhaustively the library wishes to cover the subject, the types of documents to be acquired, the desired languages and number of copies, etc.

The acquisition policy guides the librarians in the process of selecting and obtaining documents. It ensures the harmonized development, continuity and coherence of the current collection. It also enables the librarians to explain their acquisition choices to readers.

2. Acquisition policy

The acquisition policy sets out the topics covered by the library, the level of coverage, its sources, and the selection and weeding-out criteria.

2.1. Topics

The subjects covered by the library reflect the diversity of the ICRC's fields of activity. Central to its collections are humanitarian law, the ICRC and its work, other humanitarian action, and conflict studies.

Material about related or complementary subjects is acquired with a view to supporting analyses of the main subjects.

All the documents are classified into six main topics, as follows:

- **the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**
- **international humanitarian law**
- **humanitarian issues**
- **protection**
- **conflict studies**
- **detention.**

2.2. Level of coverage

The library is unable and unwilling to systematically acquire all documents appearing in all fields of interest to the ICRC. This is why each topic is clearly identified and defined according to the Conspectus scale.³

There are usually six collecting levels in this scale. Because of the unique nature of its collections, however, the ICRC library only uses four.

2.2.1. Minimal level – Level 1

At this level, the collection includes a few basic works and is frequently updated.

Subjects such as public international law and natural disasters fall within this category.

2.2.2. Basic information level – Level 2

This level includes general materials that serve to introduce and define a subject. Such a collection includes:

- basic works,
- selected editions of important works,
- a few major periodicals.

This collecting level provides basic information about a specialized subject. It is highly selective.

Subjects such as geopolitics and peace fall within this category.

2.2.3. Research level – Level 3

This level applies to fields of research that are priorities for the ICRC. Materials are collected systematically, with the aim of building a fairly comprehensive collection. It meets and tries to anticipate the requirements of researchers.

Depending on the subject, a lot of older material may be included and material in foreign languages is often kept.

Access to these information sources means acquiring:

- a very wide selection of specialized monographs
- an extensive collection of journals
- most major reference works
- material in different languages
- well-preserved older material that is retained for historical research.

Subjects such as assistance and international criminal law fall within this category.

2.2.4. Comprehensive level – Level 4

This level strives to be exhaustive. Insofar as is possible, such a collection will include:

- all the significant works, in all applicable languages, for a necessarily defined and limited field
- older material that is retained for historical research, with a major effort at conservation.

³ The Conspectus scale is a system for evaluating collections that was developed by the Research Libraries Group. It is designed to be a simple but meaningful way to assess the extent of the information currently existing, targeted and achieved in a collection (see <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html>).

Subjects such as international humanitarian law and the ICRC's history and activities fall within this category.

2.3. Topics and collecting levels

International Committee of the Red Cross and the Movement (level 4)

Related subjects: Biography (1), Federation and National Societies (1), international organizations / non-governmental organizations (1)

International humanitarian law (level 4)

Related subjects: International criminal law (3), human rights (2), public international law (1)

Humanitarian issues (level 3)

Related subjects: Natural-disaster relief (1), medicine (1)

Protection (level 3)

Children (2), environment (2), women (2), cultural property (2), journalists (2), displaced persons (2), refugees (2)⁴

Conflict studies (level 3)

Related subjects: Naval warfare (2), air warfare (2), economics (2), history (2), geopolitics (2), peace (2), terrorism (2), weapons (2), religion (2), psychology (1)

Detention (level 3)

Related subjects: General overview (2), prisoners of war (2), concentration camps (2), torture (2), security detainees (2), missing persons (2)

2.4. Implementing the acquisition policy

The library adapts the content and direction of its collections to the organization's requirements.

The acquisition policy is implemented as follows. Each librarian is in charge of one or more topics and is responsible for:

- making suggestions and approving new acquisitions

⁴ All these topics become level 4 when they are linked to international humanitarian law.

- 'weeding' the collections on his/her appointed topics
- working with the services and departments concerned by the topic
- exploring outside resources (electronic or paper).

2.5. Sources

The following sources are used to select new acquisitions:

- commercial publishers' catalogues and advertisements such as Cambridge and Bruylant (The growing use of electronic catalogues makes it possible to receive alerts when new works are released in your specified subject areas.)
- book retailers' catalogues (Fnac, Amazon, etc.),
- bibliographies included in books and periodicals
- other libraries' acquisition lists (Peace Palace Library, Geneva Graduate Institute, etc.)
- bibliographic databases (Academic Search, Political Science Abstract, etc.).
- Books in print and Electre.
- Readers' suggestions.
- Specialized blogs.

Donations are a not inconsiderable source of new additions to collections. However, the library has to make a very strict selection of the works donated to it, based on the need to enhance its collections and on its limited storage and open-access space. The library is perfectly free to refuse any material that does not belong in its collections.

Exchanges of material are part of the editorial promotion policy of the *International Review of the Red Cross* and are therefore not directly managed by the library. The documents (mainly periodicals) collected in this way are passed on to the library, which includes them in its collections if they meet the criteria of the acquisition policy. If so, they are made available to the public.

2.6. Selection

Documents to be acquired are identified by the librarians using selection procedures. These procedures are important reference tools for their daily work. Each topic covered by the library has its own selection procedure. These selection procedures include several aspects:

- a precise definition of the topic in question
- details of the selection criteria (such as language, type of document, etc.) and the objectives of the topic in question
- a list of the selection tools used.

Each procedure is drawn up and updated by the librarian in charge of the topic.

The library acquires monographs, journals, conference documents, series, treaties and grey literature. Generally speaking, just one copy is acquired, unless it is a document that is in high demand or seen as a work of reference. In such cases, a second copy may be acquired.

When the document exists in electronic format, the library includes that in its collection, in addition to the hard copy.

The main language of the documents acquired is English, followed by French. To a lesser extent, the library also acquires material in German, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and so on.

By working closely and regularly with the relevant units, the librarians are able to anticipate research needs.

Readers' acquisition requests are granted provided they are consistent with the acquisition policy.

The library has the final word on acquisitions.

2.7. Weeding

The library's collections should constantly evolve, which is why the library regularly 'weeds' its current collections.

Materials whose content is deemed obsolete by the person in charge of the topic are discarded. To do so, he/she assesses the value of a document and/or looks at how many times it has been borrowed. Discarded documents are either pulped or given away to readers free of charge.

Documents about the ICRC or humanitarian law are an exception to this rule and are kept.

The ICRC collection, the historical collection, the National Society collection and the State-practice collection are not combed in this way.

2.8. Conservation

The historical collection, the National Society collection and the ICRC collection are stored in roller racking systems, where the temperature and humidity level are controlled in order to conserve the documents.

Owing to a lack of space in the open-access area, some less-consulted topics and out-of-print journals, as well as the State-practice collection, are also stored in roller racking systems.

3. Conclusion

The acquisition policy is a tool designed to guide the library's efforts along specific lines, thereby facilitating decision-making. This policy does not break with existing practices; rather it clarifies them and makes them more explicit. Any acquisition policy needs to evolve. It will need to adjust to emerging requirements and new formats, as well as taking account of new partnerships, if necessary. The policy will need to be reviewed regularly.

Facts and figures

Documents

The library's current collection is made up of approximately 25,000 documents and 300 periodicals, of which some 120 are still in print.

A further 4,000 documents make up the historical collection (documents collected between 1864 and 1919). There are another 1,000 entries in the National Society collection.

The State-practice collection has some 1,100 documents.

Acquisitions

In 2011, the library catalogued 1,595 documents (a mix of monographs, articles and chapters).