

ICRC ARCHIVES ACQUISITION POLICY



I. PURPOSE

- 1 The Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) document the history of humanity through the prism of humanitarian law and action during warfare from 1863 to the present. The records held in the Archives valorize the ICRC's past actions and thinking to inform its present and future decision-making. The Archives enable the ICRC to be an organization that is accountable, transparent and informed by its past.
- 2 The purpose of the ICRC Archives Acquisition Policy ("the Policy") is to establish the requirements for acquiring archival records into the official ICRC Archives.

II. SCOPE

- 3 The Policy extends to all records/information/data produced or collected by and for the ICRC regardless of form, format (physical or digital) or medium, including, but not limited to, paper, audiovisual and electronic records which, under the criteria set by this policy, are eligible to be acquired for long-term archival preservation.
- 4 The Policy does **not** cover gifts received by the ICRC. The sole responsibility of the ICRC Archives with regard to gifts is to record them in the appropriate database and physically deposit them in the room provided for that purpose. The ICRC Archives do not acquire objects, as these do not constitute archival materials, nor do the ICRC Archives manage any other type of objects or gifts received by employees in the course of their duties.

III. APPLICABILITY

- 5 The Policy applies to all ICRC employees. For the purposes of the Policy, anyone who works for the ICRC under an employment contract or on another basis (such as a secondment agreement with a National Society or another employer, a consultancy contract or as a volunteer) is considered an employee.
- 6 The ICRC Archives is the sole official archival repository for the ICRC, which includes, but is not limited to, digital archives.¹
- 7 The Policy is aspirational and requires the expertise of the archivist to interpret it and ensure its long-term applicability. Subsequent guidance documents are envisioned that will further support and define archival acquisition activities as needs surface. The archivist will undertake a regular review of guidance documents when necessary and will update this Policy as the guidance documents are approved.

¹ An archives room, or place for storing records, in an ICRC delegation is not the official ICRC archival repository.

IV. MANDATE

- 8 The ICRC Archives are a unique body of records with value for humanity as a whole, extending far beyond the ICRC itself. In order for the ICRC to continue carrying out its mandate as a trusted entity, the ICRC has both a moral obligation and an institutional interest to permanently preserve records that are evidence of its:
 - 8.1 actions and decisions, including records related to the governance of the ICRC, its obligations related to business continuity and the decisions it has considered and taken
 - 8.2 mandate to protect and assist people impacted by armed conflict and other violence
 - 8.3 mandate to promote respect for, and implementation of, international humanitarian law (IHL).

V. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 9 This Policy is guided by the following principles:
 - 9.1 **Archives by Design.** The long-term accessibility of information that will become archival must be taken into account at the design phase, when information systems and applications are created or significantly modified.
 - 9.2 **Record to Report.** Significant actions and decisions must be documented in a deliberate manner that renders them accessible to the right people over time, and they must be transferred to the ICRC Archives in accordance with the retention schedules, which determine how long all recorded information at the ICRC is kept.
 - 9.3 **Respect for Personal and Sensitive Data.** The ICRC must properly retain key archival information while complying with the ICRC Policy on Personal Data Retention and Deletion as it relates to personal and sensitive information retained in the Archives. Proper care, over time, in the safety of the Archives mitigates the risk of the ICRC losing critical information documenting its decisions, the issues it considers and the impact on the people it serves. Applying this principle to archival acquisitions positions the ICRC as a trusted and transparent organization.
 - 9.4 **Digital Sobriety.** Creating and storing digital records comes at a cost, not just financially in terms of storage and time, but also in terms of digital footprint. Digital Sobriety aims to limit the consumption of digital resources. By applying this principle, the ICRC Archives will pursue an accessioning approach that is mindful of the environmental costs, thereby preserving as much as needed but as little as possible.

VI. ACQUISITION CRITERIA

INTRINSIC ARCHIVAL VALUE

- 10 Archival records are created or received by ICRC employees and assigned a permanent retention by the archivist based on their intrinsic archival value, according to their significance in terms of the following:
 - 10.1 **The ICRC's actions and decisions**, i.e. records related to decisions the ICRC has considered and taken. The focus is on records with breadth of effect and importance of subject matter. Examples include records related to organizational governance decisions – including minutes of meetings of senior decision makers such as the Assembly and the Directorate – projects undertaken and strategic direction and decisions, including options considered.
 - 10.2 **The establishment and functioning of the ICRC**, including the organization's evolving mandate, functions and responsibilities over time. Examples include headquarters agreements, records related to changing functions and mandates that capture those changes.
 - 10.3 **The ICRC's mandate to protect and assist people** impacted by armed conflict and other violence. Examples include Protection records and records documenting the ICRC's work to ensure that the authorities and other actors respect their obligations and the rights of individuals to preserve their safety, physical integrity and dignity.
 - 10.4 **The ICRC's mandate to promote respect for IHL** and its implementation through domestic law. Examples include records related to legal analysis, interpretation and development.
 - 10.5 **Unique aesthetic and artistic elements** that provide meaningful value based on form. Examples include glass plate negatives, wax seals, watermarks, watercolour sketches, maps and architectural drawings.

DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

- 11 The ICRC Archives will work closely with the body responsible for data protection, currently the ICRC Data Protection Office, to ensure that any personal data retained in the ICRC Archives is necessary and cannot be anonymized without impacting the integrity of the Archives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS

- 12 Archival records are preserved in their original form or format. The archivist may grant an exception when there is historical significance and a copy is the only one known to exist.
- 13 Archival records are not preserved in duplicate, altered or incomplete.
- 14 Archival records are authentic, meaning they are a true and accurate record made for the purpose indicated, at the time they were created or received.
- 15 Archival records are accessible and usable, or can be repaired or converted into another usable format.
- 16 Archival records are reliable and provide a trusted, accurate and full representation in their contents. The archivist may make an exception if an archival record is of significant value even when orphaned from related records.

PRACTICALITY

- 17 Preservation, conservation, transmission and transportation costs must be reasonable.

VII. ACQUISITION PROCESS

- 18 The ICRC Archives acquire records in two ways:
 - 18.1 transfer in accordance with the ICRC retention schedules
 - 18.2 donation, including bequeathment, from individuals, organizations or businesses that are or were associated with the ICRC, if the records are of intrinsic archival value as set out in the Policy. This includes ICRC records that may have been removed from the organization and personal archives collected by former employees in the course of their work.
- 19 All acquisitions are made by prior decision with the prior express consent of the archivist.
- 20 When the archivist grants general consent for the acquisition of archives, they have full discretion as to the final decision about each item. The archivist may select specific items for acquisition and return other items to the originator for any reason.
- 21 If the archivist decides to reject acquired records and not to formally accept them into the ICRC Archives (a process known as accessioning), the archivist will return the records to the originator. If the originator is unknown or no longer exists, the archivist will make every reasonable effort to identify the originator's successor(s) and return the records to them. If it is not possible to identify a successor, the unwanted records will be disposed of at the archivist's discretion.
- 22 Accessioning is done once the acquisition has been concluded and the archival records have been physically received at the ICRC Archives or, for electronic records, once an electronic transfer has been completed.

VIII. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 23 All employees must follow the ICRC retention schedules and never delete or destroy archival records in their possession.
- 24 All employees, including the Directorate, must transfer records, once archival, to the ICRC Archives and not retain them in their custody and control.
- 25 Managers must ensure archival records are regularly deposited with the ICRC Archives and take responsibility for archival records left by their departing employees.
- 26 Information management and data professionals support implementation of this Policy, assist users and ensure that best practices are followed.
- 27 The archivist, in conjunction with the relevant business owners and data protection staff, takes the final decision in determining which records are archival. The archivist may delegate this authority to their own staff.
- 28 The archivist documents any exceptions to the Policy.
- 29 Information management and technology staff work with the ICRC Archives and relevant business units to ensure that electronic systems have retention schedules assigned to them so that archival records are identified for future acquisition.
- 30 The director-general is responsible for implementing this Policy, owing to the transversal alignment required, in support of the ongoing transfer of archival records to the ICRC Archives.
- 31 This Policy has been adopted by the ICRC Assembly.

IX. APPLICABLE INTERNAL DOCUMENTS

- 32 Applicable internal documents are set forth in Annex 1, to be updated regularly by the archivist as supporting annexes to this Policy are approved.




X. DEFINITIONS

- 33 Accession: Formal acceptance of records into the ICRC Archives.
- 34 Appraisal: Process of evaluating business activities to determine which records must be captured and how long records must be kept to meet business needs, the requirements of organizational accountability and community expectations.
- 35 Archives:
- 35.1 Materials that the ICRC creates or receives in the conduct of its affairs and preserves as permanent records owing to the enduring value of their contents or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained on the basis of the principles of provenance, original order and collective control.
 - 35.2 The ICRC division responsible for maintaining those records of the organization that are of enduring value.
- 36 Archivist: Person accountable for and in charge of the activities of the ICRC Archives. The ICRC has one lead archivist who delegates authority to their staff.
- 37 Data: Set of characters or symbols to which meaning is or could be assigned.
- 38 Disposal: Range of processes associated with implementing appraisal decisions. These include the retention, deletion or destruction of records in or from record-keeping systems. Disposal may also include the migration or transmission of records between record-keeping systems, and the transfer of custody or ownership of records.
- 39 Electronic records: Any combination of text, graphics, data, audio, pictorial or other information represented in digital form that is created, received, modified, maintained, retrieved or distributed by a computer system.
- 40 Information: Data in context. In this case, context provides a meaning to the data, a reason for the data to be presented in a given format and relevance for a certain usage. Information is an assemblage of data intended for communication, either through space or across time. Information is referred to as “unstructured information” if the data that composes the information does not adhere to a specific structure.
- 41 Personal data: Information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. This may include identifiers such names or audiovisual materials, identification numbers, location data or online identifiers; it may also include information linked specifically to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of a data subject. Personal data also includes data identifying, or capable of identifying, human remains.
- 42 Records: Information created, received and maintained as evidence by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.
- 43 Retention schedule: List of every kind of record with all disposition actions (retain/transfer/destroy) required.

ANNEX 1 – APPLICABLE INTERNAL DOCUMENTS

- Rules Governing Access to the Archives
- Information and Data Management Framework
- Guidelines for the acquisition of audiovisual archives
- Access to Information Policy
- Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action
- ICRC Information Classification Policy
- ICRC Institutional Rules on Filing and Archiving Protection Documents and PROT6 Data
- ICRC Policy on Personal Data Retention and Deletion
- ICRC retention schedules
- ICRC Rules on Personal Data Protection
- Lignes directrices du dépôt institutionnel des publications CICR
- Politique documentaire de la Bibliothèque du CICR

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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