

IFRC/Bo Mathisen

### ALLEVIATING UNCERTAINTY

The Red Cross endeavours to alleviate uncertainty by restoring family links and helping family members to keep in touch. This work has always been one of the Red Cross objectives.

In war-torn areas the work is led by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Each year, the ICRC works to trace some 10,000 people, and forwards some 500,000 Red Cross Messages.

All 186 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies work to reunite families.

As part of this global network the Finnish Red Cross initiates some 150 tracings per year, in more than 30 countries. From Finland, we forward some 50 Red Cross Messages each year and receive about the same number of messages from other countries.

### THIS IS TRACING

The search for a missing person can be initiated by a relative, or on behalf of a relative by their carer or some other chosen representative. To

## MISSING?

## ALLEVIATING UNCERTAINTY: TRACING AND MESSAGES

### AMINA FINDS HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN

Amina fled the civil war in Afghanistan with her husband and their two children, but was separated from her family during the long and arduous journey. Amina came to Finland and expected her family to follow, but she heard nothing from them. Other family members who had remained in Afghanistan did not know where her husband or children were either. Amina filled in a Red Cross tracing form which was then sent to, among others, the Pakistan Red Crescent. Amina's husband and children were found in Islamabad.



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start the process of tracing a missing person, a Red Cross form is filled in, giving their personal data and last known address.

The Finnish Red Cross sends the tracing form to the Red Cross or Red Crescent society of the country where the missing person is thought to be. The service is confidential, which means personal data is not given to any third party. However, the local Red Cross may look for the missing person in official registers.

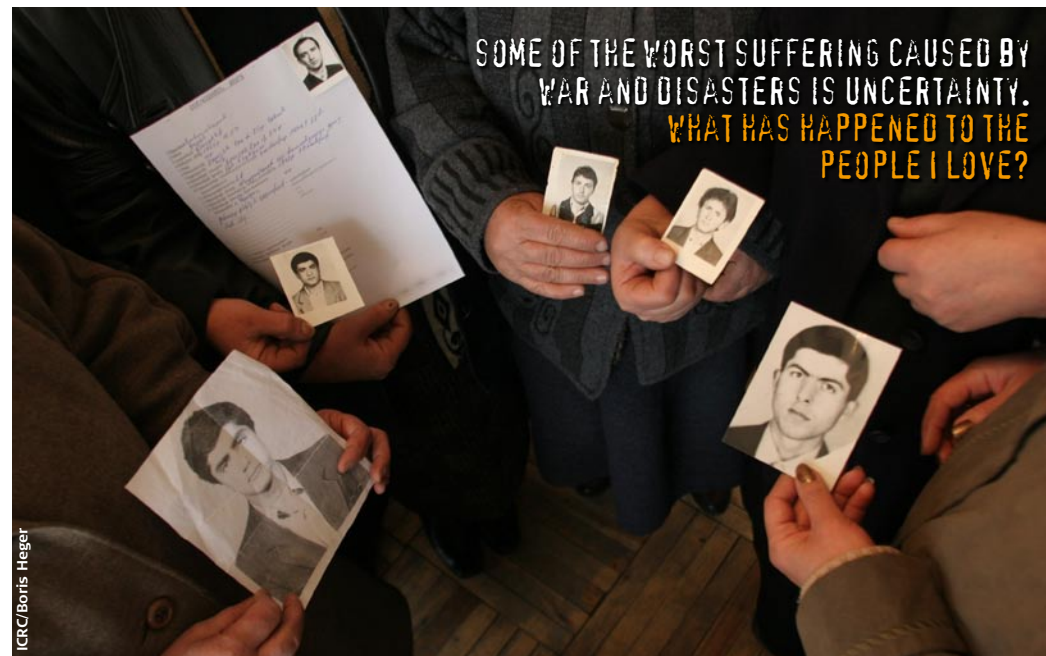
When missing people are found, they themselves are free to decide whether or not the Red Cross may notify their next-of-kin of their address.

If the tracing process does not locate the missing person, the information about them remains on the Red Cross database. If new information comes to light, the tracing process is restarted.

### RED CROSS MESSAGES

The Red Cross also helps members of a family to keep in touch with one another whenever the usual mail or telecommunication services are not available because of war or disaster. The Red Cross continues to transmit messages until the communication systems are restored.

Messages are written on a Red Cross form, which can only contain personal or family information and photographs of family members – no political messages are allowed. No money or medicines or any other such items can be sent with the message.



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The Red Cross forwards messages through its own network and either distributes them directly to individual recipients or publishes the names of recipients in refugee camps, newspapers or on the radio. If a recipient cannot be reached, the Red Cross returns the message to the sender with a note added to the form explaining why the recipient was not reached.

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HELPS

Today, the International Committee of the Red Cross stores in their databases information about victims of wars in various parts of the world. The largest data-bases contain information about the wars in Rwanda and the Balkans. All this information is also available to other humanitarian organisations.

## MOHAMED RECEIVES A MESSAGE FROM HIS SISTER

Mohamed left restless Somalia and applied for asylum in Finland. He had lost touch with his family after his parents' home was attacked by soldiers from another clan. In the hope of finding his family Mohamed sent a request to a radio show created in collaboration by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the BBC. Mohamed's sister heard her name on the radio show and wrote a Red Cross Message to her brother.



Also, the Committee maintains a Family Links website to help reunite families. People can use the website to look for their missing family members. They can fill in their own contact information and the names of people they are looking for at: [www.familylinks.icrc.org](http://www.familylinks.icrc.org).

### BASED ON INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

In war zones the work done by the Red Cross to restore family links is based on the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. Among other things, the Conventions state:

- All persons in the territory of a Party to the conflict, or in a territory occupied by it, shall be enabled to give news of a strictly personal nature to members of their families, wherever they may be, and to receive news from them. (Geneva Convention IV, 1949, Article 25)
- ... the international humanitarian organisations [...] shall be prompted mainly by the right of families to know the fate of their relatives. (Additional Protocol I, 1977, Article 32)
- The High Contracting Parties and the Parties to the conflict shall facilitate in every possible way the reunion of families dispersed as a result of armed conflicts and shall encourage in particular the work of the humanitarian organisations engaged in this task in accordance with the provisions of the Conventions and of this Protocol and in conformity with their respective security regulations. (Additional Protocol I, 1977, Article 74)

## SAMUEL'S MOTHER IS ALIVE, AFTER ALL

Nine-year-old Samuel from Angola lost touch with his parents when soldiers attacked his family's home while he was at school. He looked for them in vain for a long time. His uncle helped him escape the war in Angola and he ended up in Finland. From here he initiated a tracing process to find his parents. One day, the Red Cross reached a distant relative who thought Samuel's mother might be in Canada. Tracing efforts were then redirected to the Canadian Red Cross, which finally found Samuel's mother for him.



ICRC/Thierry Gassmann

[www.redcross.fi/tracing](http://www.redcross.fi/tracing)

WE FOLLOW THE  
PRINCIPLES OF:  
HUMANITY  
IMPARTIALITY  
NEUTRALITY  
VOLUNTARY SERVICE  
INDEPENDENCE  
UNITY  
UNIVERSALITY