



History of the International Rescue Committee

Monday, July 24, 1933



NEW GERMAN RELIEF UNIT

American Branch Formed to Aid Work Headed by Einstein.

At the request of the International Relief Association, headed by Albert Einstein, an American committee has been formed to assist Germans suffering from the policies of the Hitler regime.

Funds are being solicited to send to Mayor Charles Hueber of Strassbourg, in Alsace, France, who is treasurer of the European organization of the International Relief Association. The headquarters of the American Committee, of which Amos Pinchot is chairman, is at 11 West 42nd Street.

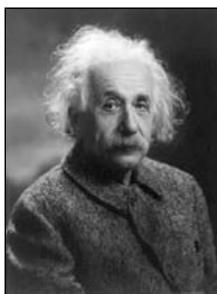
The association has been in existence for the last two years. It aids victims of civil oppression in many lands without reference to religious or political faith.

An emergency session here of the national executive committee of the American Jewish Congress was summoned yesterday for Aug. 6 by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, its chairman, to formulate a coordinated plan of action in behalf of the Jews of Germany.

1933



American branch of the European-based International Relief Association (IRA) founded at the suggestion of [Albert Einstein](#) (<http://web.archive.org/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/blog/einstein-and-ircs-beginnings-80-years-ago>) to assist **Germans suffering under Hitler**. Refugees from Mussolini's **Italy** and Franco's **Spain** are later assisted.



1940



Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC) formed to aid **European refugees trapped in Vichy France**. Over 2,000 political, cultural, union and academic leaders rescued in 13 months. ([Learn more about Varian Fry's heroic efforts here](#) (<http://web.archive.org/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/varian-fry>), and about the life of **Carel Sternberg**, another of the founding fathers of the IRC, [here](#) ([news/carel-sternberg-former-irc-head-and-giant-refugee-assistance-and-human-rights-advocacy-dies-91](http://news.carelsternberg-former-irc-head-and-giant-refugee-assistance-and-human-rights-advocacy-dies-91)).



1942



IRA and ERC join forces under the name International Relief and Rescue Committee, later shortened to the International Rescue Committee.

1945



The IRC, at the end of World War II, initiates emergency relief programs, establishes hospitals and children's centers and starts refugee resettlement efforts in Europe. With the descent of the Iron Curtain in 1946, the IRC initiates **resettlement program for East European refugees**, which continues until the end of the Cold War.



1950





The IRC intensifies its aid in Europe with Project Berlin, providing **food to the people of West Berlin** amid increased Soviet oppression.

1951



Leo Cherne

[/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/life-irc-chairman-leo-cherne](http://www.rescue.org/life-irc-chairman-leo-cherne)), a board member since 1946, elected IRC Chairman, a position he would hold for 40 years.



1954



In South Vietnam, the IRC begins a program to aid one million refugees following defeat of the French by the North Vietnamese. The program develops into a vast, **long-range relief and resettlement effort for Indochinese refugees**: Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians.



1956



The IRC starts resettlement and relief programs for **Hungarian refugees** after the revolution is crushed by Soviet forces.



1960



An IRC resettlement program begins for **Cuban refugees fleeing the Castro dictatorship** and for **Haitian refugees escaping the Duvalier regime**.

1962



IRC operations are extended to Africa when 200,000 **Angolans flee to Zaire**; IRC also begins aid to **Chinese fleeing to Hong Kong** from the mainland.



1971



IRC provides extensive support, especially medical, health, child care and schooling, for the 10 million **East Pakistani refugees fleeing to India**. The work continues as the refugees return to their new nation of Bangladesh.

IRC takes a leading role in the resettlement of **Asian nationals persecuted and expelled from Uganda** by dictator Idi Amin.

1975



Chilean refugees are assisted by the IRC in their efforts to win asylum in the U.S.; IRC also helps refugees from Uruguay, Paraguay and Guatemala.



1976



The IRC begins emergency relief, medical, educational and self-help programs for **Indochinese refugees fleeing to Thailand**, later to include thousands from **Burma**.



1977



IRC President Leo Cherne organizes the Citizens Commission on **Indochinese Refugees**, comprising a cross-section of America's political, cultural and religious leaders. The Commission conducted many trips to Southeast Asia and for years served as the leading advocate of people fleeing from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

1979
 Departure of refugees from the **Soviet Union** - mostly dissidents, Armenians, Jews reaches a peak of 53,000. Thousands are resettled by IRC.

1980
 IRC launches emergency relief programs for **Afghan** refugees fleeing to **Pakistan** <http://www.rescue.org/where/pakistan>, leading to long-term health, education, self-reliance and job training programs.



1982
 IRC assists **Palestinian** and **Lebanese** refugees uprooted by the war in Lebanon.



1984
 In **El Salvador**, the IRC initiates a broad range of health, child care and community development projects for displaced victims of civil war.

Spanish Refugee Aid becomes a division of IRC, serving the **survivors of the Spanish Civil War** in France.



1987
 IRC begins health care program in **Poland**, in partnership with the Polish trade union movement, Solidarity.

IRC responds to refugee flow of **Mozambicans** to Malawi - soon to exceed one million - by initiating relief programs. Eight years later, IRC assists the returning refugees inside Mozambique.

1988
 IRC starts community rehabilitation activities in **Afghanistan** <http://www.rescue.org/where/afghanistan> for tens of thousands of **Afghan refugees returning home from Pakistan**.

1989
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children <http://www.womenscommission.org/> established by IRC to serve the rights and interests of 80% of the world's refugees: women and children.

1991
 The IRC also launches emergency health and healthcare training programs in **Sudan** <http://www.rescue.org/where/sudan> serving some 250,000 displaced people in Bhar El Ghazal and the Upper Nile states.



1992
 IRC begins work in the **former Yugoslavia** dealing initially with the consequences of the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The IRC later launches comprehensive community rehabilitation programs in Bosnia.



In 1980, IRC starts emergency programs in the **Sudan** <http://www.rescue.org/where/sudan> for flood of refugees fleeing **Ethiopia** <http://www.rescue.org/where/ethiopia>. The work extends to **Somalia** in 1981.

After the first **Gulf War**, the IRC comes to the aid of hundreds of thousands of **Kurdish refugees** who flee to the mountains of Turkey to escape Saddam

Hussein's terror.



1994

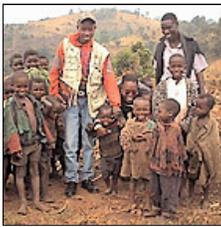
IRC sets up emergency programs to aid **Rwandan refugees** pouring into **Tanzania** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/tanzania](http://www.rescue.org/where/tanzania)) and the former Zaire (**Democratic Republic of Congo**) ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/congo](http://www.rescue.org/where/congo)) as a result of the genocide and ensuing civil war.



1995

The IRC moves into Somaliland, providing agriculture extension training and small business credit programs for **refugees returning from camps in Ethiopia** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/ethiopia](http://www.rescue.org/where/ethiopia)).

1996



In **Burundi** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/burundi](http://www.rescue.org/where/burundi)), the IRC begins emergency aid to displaced people in six of the country's 16 provinces.

1997

IRC begins operating inside Kosovo, eventually providing aid to help meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of **Kosovar refugees fleeing to Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia.**

IRC opens an office in the United Kingdom to support the IRC's global interventions and to add a new voice to the sometimes disquieting debates on refugees and asylum in the UK.



1998

IRC health care and public health services are established in **Congo-Brazzaville** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/congo](http://www.rescue.org/where/congo)).



1999

Emergency operations are launched for the East Timorese following a rampage by Indonesian militia groups that leaves tens of thousands of people homeless.



2000



In **Ingushetia** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/northern-caucasus](http://www.rescue.org/where/northern-caucasus)), the IRC launches emergency shelter, sanitation, and education for **Chechen refugees** fleeing fighting between Russian forces and separatist Chechen rebels.



2002

IRC activities broaden inside **Afghanistan** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/afghanistan](http://www.rescue.org/where/afghanistan)), with emergency aid programs to one million displaced people, and reconstruction and rehabilitation for more than two million **refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran**.



In 2002, IRC participates in the demobilization of 1,200 child soldiers in **Sierra Leone** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/sierra-leone](http://www.rescue.org/where/sierra-leone)).

IRC undertakes an advocacy campaign to reverse the U.S. government's slowdown in **refugee resettlement** approval following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.



2003

IRC responds to the war in Iraq with water and sanitation, and health care support. Programs expand in **West Africa**, with continued war in **Liberia** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/liberia](http://www.rescue.org/where/liberia)) and new fighting in Ivory Coast, and growing populations of refugees and displaced persons in those countries and in **Guinea** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/guinea](http://www.rescue.org/where/guinea)) and **Sierra Leone** ([/web/20140702230622/http://www.rescue.org/where/sierra-leone](http://www.rescue.org/where/sierra-leone)). Programs include health, education, family reunification and gender-based violence prevention.

The IRC's Mortality Survey for the Democratic Republic of Congo estimates that 3.9 million people have died in the DRC since the conflict began in 1998, making it the world's deadliest conflict since World War II.

2004

IRC mobile relief teams, with specialists in health, water and sanitation, and child protection, deliver emergency services and supplies to the province of Aceh, the region closest to the epicenter of the devastating December 26, 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia.

In Sudan, the IRC begins providing health, water and sanitation, hygiene awareness, shelter, flood and drought relief, food security and economic revitalization assistance to nearly 100 communities in the Darfur region.

The IRC starts providing essential services to Sudanese refugees in neighboring Chad.



2005 Long-term aid by the IRC continues to help tsunami-affected communities in Indonesia by rehabilitating healthcare infrastructure, providing psychosocial support to children and families, and offering community regeneration.

Following a devastating earthquake in Pakistan, IRC emergency teams respond to help 250,000 people and treat thousands of the sick and injured.

Working with local groups, the IRC provided urgent assistance to thousands of people affected by fighting between Israeli forces and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

2006



2007



IRC launches campaign to aid and support over 4 million displaced and uprooted Iraqis

2008



The IRC observes our 75th anniversary.

2009



IRC affiliate the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children becomes the **Women's Refugee Commission**
<http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/>

Read about the IRC's **impact in 2013**
<http://www.rescue.org/irc-fast-facts>

2013