



(ICRC, Geneva) - To help members of dispersed families restore contact with each other, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is launching a new website – [familylinks.icrc.org](http://familylinks.icrc.org) – on 13 November.

"Familylinks.icrc.org will change the way people go about getting back in touch with family members they've become separated from," said Olivier Dubois, deputy head of the Central Tracing Agency and Protection Division of the ICRC. "Staying in touch with other members of one's family has a huge effect on a person's well-being and their ability to cope with a crisis. We have developed this simple, user-friendly website together with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies for people who want to restore contact with relatives during or after a crisis," he explained. "A few clicks will put them in touch with dedicated specialists who will provide personal follow-up on enquiries."

Regardless of whether people are fleeing armed conflict, other violence, natural disaster, poverty or other causes of hardship, displacement can cause them to be cut off from their loved ones. Whatever the reason for a person's struggles, staff and volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent network strive to ensure that they are treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

"What makes the new familylinks.icrc.org website special is the way it combines suitable technology and unique resources," explained Mr Dubois. "The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has a grassroots network of volunteers already on the ground, in virtually every corner of the world, who actively search for missing persons. No other organization in the world can provide such a service."

One example of the strength of the grassroots network is provided by the story of a Libyan man who fled his country in 1968 and settled in Switzerland. For decades, he was totally cut off from relatives and friends. This year, with help from the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross, he was able

to get back in contact with his loved ones in Libya and go visit them. "Seeing your family again after 43 years – it's like being born again," said Mr Al Naji, overwhelmed by emotion as he set foot on Libyan soil.

"Many more people will be able to find out what services are available and how to obtain them. We may well see an increase in the number of tracing requests," said Mr Dubois. The new website will provide information on tracing services available in every part of the world, contact details of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and ICRC delegations, and other useful resources. While the chief purpose of familylinks.icrc.org will be to serve people searching for loved ones, the website may also be of interest to humanitarian organizations and welfare service providers to whom these people have turned for help. The site will also serve as a platform for exchanges between tracing specialists.

Under international law, people have the right to be informed of the fate of missing relatives. Where appropriate, everything possible must be done to find out where they are, restore contact with them and reunite them with their families.

The ICRC launched its first website of this kind in 1996 in response to the Bosnia conflict. The organization has since set up ad hoc sites in response to 23 crises, most recently in connection with last year's tsunami in Japan. Over the years, these efforts have helped countless people restore contact with relatives.

See TV footage on Mr Al Naji's story at the [ICRC's video newsroom](#) .

### **Libya: reunited after 43 years of exile**

On the occasion of the launch of its new restoring family links website, the ICRC presents the story of a Libyan refugee in Switzerland who is reunited with his family after 43 years of separation. Through a Red Cross message written by the family in Libya and transmitted by the ICRC Benghazi office, the Swiss Red Cross was able to locate Mr Al-Naji. The newly established website familylinks.icrc.org will now facilitate the work of the Red Cross Red Crescent to help restore contact between family members.

**War, disaster and migration separate thousands of family members every year.**

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